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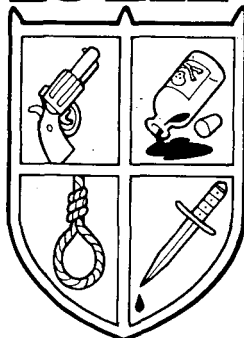
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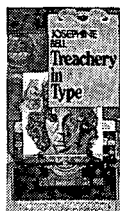
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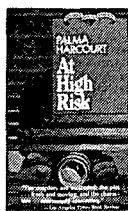
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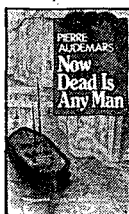
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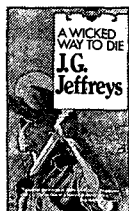
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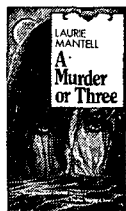
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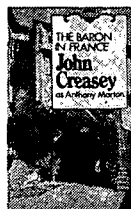
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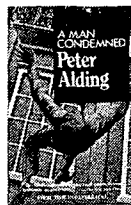
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**U**pcoming events: The adventuresome Michigan Mystery Writers in conjunction with Sherri Lynn Productions, Inc., are getting set for a weekend in Nevada, in the second of their Mobile Mysteries. "Nightmare in Nevada" is scheduled for the weekend of February 15-18 and costs \$400 based on double occupancy. That includes round trip plane fare from Detroit to Las Vegas, three nights at the Hacienda Hotel there, and "a side trip to ghostly Old Nevada Town for a steak roast and open bar. At this time an incident will occur to set off a nightmarish weekend. . . ." Checks or money orders should be made payable to Sherri Lynn Productions and sent to the attention of Helen Esper Olmstead at Michigan Mystery Writers, 21315 Pembroke, Detroit 48219. For further information: (313)532-3882.

If you'd rather go to Mexico instead, W. V. Travel, Ltd., in New York, is sponsoring two mystery cruises aboard the Holland America-owned *M S Noordam*, each of them seven days long. The first, from San Francisco to Acapulco, departs on February 9; the second, from

Acapulco to San Francisco, departs on February 16; both will make several intermediate stops. The price may include free air fare from your city and back again—for details, call 1-800-221-3302.

And finally, if you'd like to travel even farther afield, you can join "a unique mystery tour to England" from February 24-March 6. It involves a mystery weekend "at a stately Victorian seaside resort hotel"; five days in London where participants will visit the haunts of Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, and the like, attend a mystery play and meet several authors of mystery novels, among other activities; and side trips to Oxford, Devon, and the environs of the latter, the infamous Dartmoor, for example. The cost: \$1570 per person based on double occupancy for the total land tour expenses. Air fare is not included. Further information can be obtained from ICTS/Intercontinental Travel Systems of San Diego, at 1-800-227-3800, extension ICTS.

At Bouchercon XV, held in October in Chicago, winners of the annual Shamus awards be-

stowed by the Private Eye Writers of America were announced:

**BEST HARDCOVER PRIVATE EYE NOVEL OF 1983:**

*True Detective* by Max Allan Collins (St. Martin's)

**BEST PAPERBACK PRIVATE EYE NOVEL OF 1983:**

*Dead in Center Field* by Paul Engelman (Ballantine)

**BEST PRIVATE EYE SHORT STORY OF 1983: "Cat's Paw"**

by Bill Pronzini (Waves Press)

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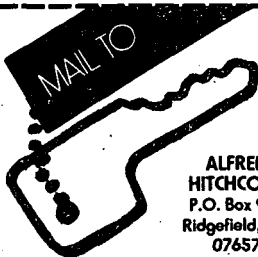


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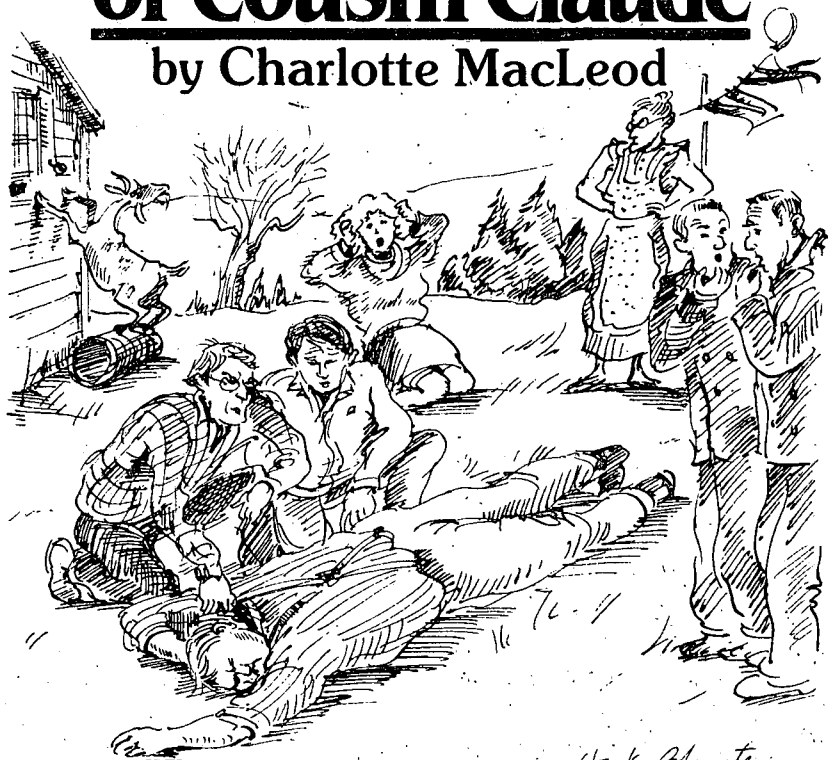
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FICTION

# The Unlikely Demise of Cousin Claude

by Charlotte MacLeod



**Y**ou know how it is around a medical research laboratory about half past five on a Friday afternoon. Or maybe you don't, but it certainly is. So when Carter-Harrison emerged from the fastness wherein he does what-

*Illustration by Hank Blaustein*

ever he does and suggested a spot of research involving a couple of boiled lobsters and a seidel or two, I cheerfully acquiesced.

We were nicely settled in a booth at Ye Old Lobster Trappe, a Boston landmark since 1973,



with our paper bibs around our necks and our nutcrackers at the ready when Carter-Harrison remarked, "You ought to taste a real lobster, Bill."

"I'm about to," I replied as the waitress, whose name is neither Marge nor Myrtle but in fact Melpomene, set one in front of me. My companion, a man of science first and foremost, reached across the table and tore off one of its claws, which he proceeded to excavate and consume the meat thereof.

"Not bad, considering," he admitted, wiping melted butter off his chin. "But wait till you toss a bicuspid over a genuine Beagleport lobster, hauled from the briny blue Atlantic about fourteen minutes before you get your grubhooks onto it."

"You owe me a claw," I said. "Where's Beagleport?"

Carter-Harrison ate one of his own claws—or, to be scientifically accurate, one of his own lobster's claws—and wiped more melted butter off his chin. He has one of those long, bony New England jaws ideally adapted for getting dripped on. Then he punctiliously gave me his other claw. Then he uttered.

"Did I ever tell you about my family?"

"I never knew you had one," I replied. "I thought you sprang full-armored from the brow of Dr. Spock."

He thought that one over for a while. "Ah, I see. One of your jokes. No, Williams, I was born pretty much according to normal procedure, of not exactly poor and almost ridiculously honest parents, in the village of Beagleport, Maine."

"I'll bet you were a beautiful baby," I said with my mouth full of tail meat.

"My mother always thought so. That's why she insisted on splicing her maiden name of Carter to the parental cognomen. My parents have now passed to the Great Beyond, namely Palm Springs, but the old family homestead is still occupied by my Aunt Agapantha and my cousins Ed and Fred. I was thinking we might take a run up there this weekend."

"Are you sure this is the right time of year to go?" I asked, gazing out the window at the lashing sleet that gives our city so much of its gentle springtime charm.

"The perfect time," he assured me. "We won't run into any tourists."

"I wouldn't mind running into some tourists," I said, but he wasn't listening. These excessively brainy types never do.

And that's why, some three hours later, we were groping our way up the Maine Turnpike in my old Chevy. I was groping,

anyway, trying to sort out the road from the surrounding frozen wastes by the occasional glimpses I was able to get through my slush-caked windshield. Carter-Harrison was thinking deep thoughts. At least I assumed he was. He never said.

By ten o'clock, I'd had it. We found a motel open somewhere between Kittery and the Arctic Circle, and turned in. I woke expecting more of the same, but Saturday dawned crisp and clear. We got out of the motel early—there wasn't much there to hang around for—and fetched Beagleport around the middle of the morning.

Carter-Harrison started barking orders like, "Left at the fire station," and "Right at the general store." At last he sat back with a sigh of relief. "Now, we're on the home road."

"This is a road?" I cried in startled disbelief.

He didn't answer. He was busy sniffing, his bony nose straight forward like a bird-dog's at the point, his bony cheeks flushed, the way they get when he's about to give birth to another bright idea. I felt an ominous twinge.

"What's eating you?" I said.

"It's the air," he replied.

There sure was a lot of it. I tried a few sniffs myself, a rich blend of salt, pine trees, and

ancient vehicles. We sniffed our way along until we came to two houses, one of them painted baby blue with scalloped pink shutters. The other was merely white. It was when we reached this latter that Carter-Harrison yelled, "Starboard your helm."

"Huh?" I said.

"Turn right. This is our driveway."

And so it proved to be. Ah, I thought, civilization at last. Then a powerful voice welled up from the bulkhead and ricocheted off my eardrums.

"What in time are you settin' there for like a pair o' ninnies?"

Carter-Harrison leaped from the car. "Hello, Aunt Aggie."

"Well, James. I might o' known. Couldn't you of wrote first?"

A woman of uncertain years wearing an awfully certain kind of expression emerged and confronted her nephew. She was almost as tall as he, though not so skinny. After a certain amount of glaring back and forth, he bent his head to kiss her on the cheek. She let him. Neither of them appeared to enjoy it much. I thought I might as well join the party, so I got out of the car and Aunt Aggie turned her glare on me.

"Who's the young'un?"

"My colleague, Dr. Bill Williams," Carter-Harrison told

her. "I brought him up to see the place."

"Doctor, eh?" She hauled a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles out of her sweater pocket, gave them a wipe with her apron, put them on, and looked me over. "Huh, he don't even look dry behind the ears yet. 'Least he ain't all skin an' bones like you, James. Ain't enough meat on you to grease a griddle with. Well, come on in. Can't stand here lollygaggin' around the dooryard all day. Oh, drat an' tarnation! Go on, git! Scat! Shoo!"

At first I thought Aunt Aggie meant us, but it soon became clear she was addressing a large brown goat with white spots. As she pursued it across the yard, we could see the creature was chewing on a piece of rag. She made pretty good time, but the goat was faster. At last she came back, her apron at half-mast, her expression one of mingled fury and despair.

"There went the last o' my good pillowcases. I'd like to wring that critter's neck."

"Then why don't you?" asked her nephew, ever the keen, inquiring mind.

"'Cause he ain't my goat, that's why."

"Ergo, why do you let him into the yard?"

"I don't let him, you dern fool. He comes."

"Isn't there any way to keep him out?"

"Might try a deer rifle, but I misdoubt he'd just eat the bullet an' want another."

"Have you thought of building a fence?" I asked her.

She gave me a look. "Ed an' Fred spent fifty-two hard-earned dollars on barbed wire, an' three days' worktime stringin' it. He'd et his way through an' bit the tail off Fred's Sunday shirt before they'd got the posthole digger put away."

"You ought to sue his owner for damages."

"That's real bright o' you, Willie."

"Well," said Carter-Harrison, "why don't you?"

"Because," said Aunt Aggie, "that's why."

She nodded over toward the baby blue house with the pink shutters. A fluffy little blonde with a fluffy pink coat on was tripping winsomely down the steps. The goat ran to meet her, and she flung her arms around its neck.

"Oh, you naughty Spotty," we heard her coo. "What have you got in your mouth?"

She came across the yard to us, snuggling the goat against her pink fluff. "Has Spotty been a bad boy again, Auntie Agapantha?"

I expected Auntie Agapantha to snap the blonde's head off

and swallow it in one gulp. Instead, she only shrugged.

"'Twasn't nothin', Lily Ann. Just an old dishrag."

"I've told him and told him." Lily Ann gave her curls a sad little shake. "I've said time and time again, Spotty, if you don't leave Auntie Agapantha's clothesline alone, I'll have to give you a spanking. But he never pays a mite of attention."

"Now, don't you fret yourself," Aunt Aggie insisted. "Lily Ann, I don't believe you've met my nephew James that's a doctor down to Boston. An' this here's his friend William that helps around the hospital some. Lily Ann's the one that married Cousin Claude, James. You remember I told you Claude got married?"

"Yep," said Carter-Harrison. "And killed. Did they ever find the murderer?"

Lily Ann burst into tears. Carter-Harrison began to look uncomfortable but didn't drop the subject.

"Stands to reason, doesn't it?" he said. "Claude was supposed to have caught his necktie in the cream separator and been strangled to death. Whoever wore a necktie separating cream? Claude wouldn't have known how to tie one anyway, even if he'd owned a necktie, which he didn't."

"He did s-so," sobbed Lily

Ann. "He w-wore a tie at our wedding."

"Rented it with the suit," snorted Carter-Harrison.

"And I g-gave him another one for Christmas. He w-wore it because he l-loved me."

The young widow settled down to some serious bewailment. Aunt Aggie gave her eminent nephew what can best be described as a look.

Then she put her arm around Lily Ann's shoulders and led her away toward the baby blue house with the pink shutters. We two were standing there feeling like a nickel apiece when an old pickup truck clunked into what I had been assured was the driveway. Two men got out, one a clone of the other, though it would have been impossible to say which was the original and which the copy. They were both wearing ragged blue work shirts, ragged gray work pants, and ragged navy blue pea jackets. Both looked a lot like Carter-Harrison.

"Hahyah, James," said one.

"Hahyah, James," said the other.

"Hahyah, Fred. Hahyah, Ed," said James, as I may as well call him. "This is Bill Williams, a friend of mine from the lab. My cousins Ed and Fred, Bill."

"Hahyah, Ed. Hahyah, Fred," I replied. "Mind my asking which is which?"



"We don't mind," said Ed, or Fred.

"But it wouldn't do no good," said Fred, or Ed.

"You'd mix us up anyway."

"Folks always do."

"So do we, sometimes."

"What ails Lily Ann?"

"She's cryin' again."

The first part of our conversation had been amiable enough, but these last two remarks were made in definitely accusatory tones. It was clear that both Ed and Fred had strong feelings about Lily Ann.

"It's because I just happened to ask who murdered Claude," James explained.

"Some Boy Scout, maybe," said one twin.

"Doin' his good deed for the day," said the other.

"Lily Ann done all right out of it."

"Got rid o' Claude."

"Got his folks' house."

"An' the farm. Fifty acres, prime land. Prime for Beagleport, anyways."

"Seaweed makes good top dressin'. Lot o' seaweed been spread over them acres down through the years."

"Raise anything you've a mind to."

"Lily Ann's not farming it herself, is she?" James broke in.

"Nope. Rents it to Abner Glutch."

"Abner Glutch? I thought he

owned the hardware store."

"Does."

"Owns the fillin' station, too."

"Gets men to run 'em for him."

"Got eight, nine workin' for him now."

"Makin' money hand over fist."

"Come to think of it," said James, "didn't I hear something about his trying to buy Claude out when his parents died?"

"Ayup. Claude wouldn't sell."

"Claude would o' sold." It was the first sign of disharmony between Ed and Fred. "Mother wouldn't let 'im. Told 'im he'd blow the money in two, three years, then where'd he be?"

"'Bout where he is now, like as not. Damn shame the poor bugger never got the chance to spend it."

"Would o' left Lily Ann holdin' the short end o' the stick."

"Then she'd o' needed a new husband, wouldn't she?"

Aha, I thought. Now we were getting to the crux of the matter.

"She could hardly have picked a worse one than Claude," said James. "I can't imagine why she'd cry over a clown like that. Claude had an I.Q. of about fifty-six and looked just like that blasted goat. Beats what she ever saw in him."

"Beats me," Ed affirmed.

"Beats me," Fred agreed.

At least they both said it beat them, though I'm not sure of the order. I was comparing one craggy face with another, and it appeared to me that they all three looked about equally besotted with Lily Ann.

You may argue that it was impossible for Dr. James Carter-Harrison to have become smitten by a fluffy blonde head and a weepy blue eye in so short a space of time, but that's because you don't know Dr. James Carter-Harrison. He'd already fallen in love three times during that same week, all three with semi-disastrous results. Maybe this was a family trait. Anyway, it made me nervous.

"Let's go take a look at that clothesline your aunt was complaining about," I suggested, to divert his attention. "It's cold standing here."

None of the three cousins answered me, they just wheeled and stomped around behind the house, two of them wearing sea-boots and the other walking as if he did. I was a little surprised they'd been so willing to let the subject be changed, then I wasn't. If in fact Claude Harrison had been wilfully done to death by the unlikely instruments of a necktie and a cream separator, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that one of Lily Ann's lovestruck neigh-

bors might have had a hand and possibly even a cravat in his sudden demise.

Since I was going to be their houseguest, I thought it would be rude to pursue the matter. Instead, I joined the cousins in grim contemplation of Aunt Aggie's clothes reel.

"Pitiful," was my diagnosis, and nobody disputed it. The upper halves of various items were hung on the lines that stretched among the various poles that poked out from the center like the ribs of an umbrella only less so, if you get my drift. You've seen the things, you know what I mean. Anyway, the bottoms of said items were either hanging in shreds or missing altogether. Around the pole lay the remains of attempted fortifications: shattered picket fencing, tangles of chicken wire, oil drums, and suchlike futile measures.

"Have you tried land mines?" I suggested.

"Can't do that," said one twin.

"Lily Ann wouldn't like it," said the other.

"Can't say I'd go for 'em much myself," snapped a now-familiar voice behind us.

"Oh hello, Aunt Aggie," said James. "Have you tried cayenne pepper in the rinse water?"

"He found it appetizin'. Speakin' of which, I s'pose you're hungry as usual."

"We had a snack at the motel."

"Huh."

She tossed her head toward the kitchen. We followed. This turned out to have been the correct move. She fed us home-cured ham, new-laid eggs, home-grown and home-hashed potatoes, homemade biscuits with homemade jam, and a few other odds and ends. I attempted a little light conversation to be polite, but James sat lost in thought. At last he quit chewing and spoke.

"Aunt Aggie, is there any place around here we could buy one of those supersonic dog whistles?"

"Ed got me one. Spotty swallowed it."

"Well, I'll think of something," he muttered, absently helping himself to a few more biscuits.

He continued to ponder. You could practically hear the brains churning, or maybe it was the biscuits. At last, as his aunt was making a pointed remark about did we think we was going to set here all day, he leaped from his chair like Archimedes from his bath.

"I've got it! Mind if I borrow your truck, boys?"

"We was goin' to pick up a mess o' lobsters," one of them demurred.

"Thought Bill here might like

'em," added the other.

"Might get a few extra."

"Ask Lily Ann over."

"We can go in my car," I said.

So we did, all but James, who drove off in the truck by himself whistling "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy."

His aunt followed his departure with a jaundiced eye. "Got another of his fool notions, I'll be bound. Been like that ever since he was knee-high to a sculpin. Beats me how James ever lived to grow up."

She was off on a stream of reminiscences. James had always been an ingenious little cuss, it appeared, right from the time he'd tried to hatch a clutch of duck eggs in his Sunday rompers.

"But he's one of the most respected men in his field," I protested. "We consider him a genius."

"Genius is as genius does," she sniffed.

They steered me down the shore road so I could view the breaking waves dashing high on a stern and rockbound coast; then we went back to the house, arriving in a dead heat with James.

"Ah, good," he said. "I can use some help unloading."

"Go ahead, fellows," I said, quick-thinking as always. "I'll take care of the lobsters."

Aunt Aggie had taken ad-

vantage of my good nature to make a few extra stops, but I didn't care. There was a lot of nautical language coming from the back yard and I figured I'd got the best of the bargain. After I'd lugged in her manifold purchases, though, she remarked that if there was a worse nuisance than a man around the kitchen, she didn't know what it might be and I better go see what them three out there was up to, so I went.

One of the twins was up on a ladder screwing a pulley into the side of the house. The other was threading a vast amount of new manila rope through some more pulleys that had been attached to the center pole of the clothes reel. Carter-Harrison was horsing around with one of those heavy gas cylinders we see so many of back at the lab.

"Great idea," I exclaimed. "You're going to anaesthetize the goat."

"I don't think Lily Ann would go much for that," said the twin on the ladder.

"Me neither," said the one on the ground.

The goat wasn't saying anything, just sitting there waiting to see where his next meal was coming from.

"Then what's in the tank?" I asked. "Oxygen? Isn't there enough of that floating around up here already?"

"It's helium," Carter-Harrison explained. "Would you mind stepping over to the truck and bringing us that brown baglike object we took the precaution of leaving locked in the cab? Got the keys, Ed?"

"Fred's got 'em," said the man on the ladder.

Ah, at last I knew which twin was which. Provided Ed stayed up on the ladder, anyway. I took the keys, said, "Thanks, Fred," to flaunt my newly-acquired knowledge, and went to get the brown baglike object, still unscathed by goatly tooth. I could swear Spotty snickered when he saw it.

When I got back to the scene of the activity, Carter-Harrison had both hands full of rope and an end between his teeth. "Gahawoo? Gooh!"

Being expensively educated, I was able to translate. "Balloon? Is that what this is? What do you want it for?"

He spat out the rope end. "Elementary, my dear Williams. We hitch the balloon to the top of the clothes reel, Aunt Aggie hangs out her wash, we inflate the balloon with helium from the tank, then pay out enough line to raise the reel out of the goat's reach. The ropes will be fastened to those cleats up beside the window where she has her washing machine, so she needn't even go outdoors



to raise or lower the reel, just haul it in as far as she wants."

By this time, his aunt's face had in fact appeared at the aforesaid window. Carter-Harrison hitched a short length of hose from the tank to the balloon, let the brown bag fall, then started paying out the guy ropes.

"See, Aunt Aggie, we've got 'er ballasted, and you can adjust the ropes to keep the pole upright. When you want to reel in, just give a tug on this hunk of fishline. That will pull the stopper out of the balloon and let the gas escape slowly. You just haul in your lines and she'll come up all standing."

He raised the reel about fifteen feet above the ground, then handed the guy ropes to Ed, who fastened them to the cleats beside the window, came down, and took away the ladder. Spotty made a few frantic leaps at the clothes flapping high above, then fell back, a shattered goat.

"I do declare, James," cried Aunt Aggie. "I b'lieve it's goin' to work. But what happens when that there gas tank gits empty?"

"Take it to Lem Maddox and he'll give you another."

"An' charge me a fortune for it, I'll be bound."

"Oh no. You're not paying for the tank, you know, just the gas."

"Huh. Forkin' out good money for a passel o' wind."

Spotty made another futile leap.

"But I guess it'll be wuth it. You know what? I'm goin' upstairs an' get that old dress suit Uncle Hector wore to Warren G. Harding's inauguration. It ain't had a good airin' since Lily Ann got that dratted goat. Could you just haul that reel down for a minute an' let it up again without emptyin' the balloon, James? No sense wastin' gas when you just filled it."

"I expect we can manage. Go get the suit, Aunt Aggie."

By the time she returned, we'd collected an audience. Lily Ann was back, pinker and fluffier than before, and she had a man with her. Quite a large man, who looked a lot like Teddy Roosevelt in his later and portlier years. His name was Abner Glutch and he was wearing a necktie. In fact, as Aunt Aggie remarked, he was all togged out like a hog goin' to war.

"How come you're so fancy, Abner? It ain't Sunday till tomorrow, in case you lost count."

"Nope," he told her, "I ain't lost nothin'. I have gained me a helpmeet. Me an' Lily Ann just snuck off quiet by ourselves an' tied the knot."

"We didn't want any fuss," Lily Ann explained, "out of re-

spect for Claude." She strove manfully, or rather womanfully, to keep the quiver out of her voice.

"Well, I swan!" cried Aunt Aggie.

I swanned, too. So Abner Glutch had found a way to get his pudgy mitts on the late Claude's ancestral acres, Aunt Agapantha notwithstanding. I looked at his necktie and wondered where he'd been when Claude got snarled up in the cream separator.

Now, it appeared, all we could do was celebrate the event. As soon as she'd finished hanging up her Uncle Hector's dress suit, to the admiration of all present except Spotty, Aunt Aggie invited everybody into the front parlor for tea and cake. The goat stayed outside, banging one of the oil drums around in hopeless frustration. Ed and Fred had been made to take off their sea boots before they joined the party, but I didn't think this was what made them so glum. They sat chomping down cake and looking as if they'd rather be out back with Spotty, banging oil drums around.

No doubt to disarm us into believing he loved Lily Ann for herself alone, Abner insisted on telling us what he was giving her for wedding presents. He'd already insured his life in her

favor and deeded over both his store and his filling station.

"And I'm going to deed over the farm to Abner," said Lily Ann, sweet innocent that she was. "It's the least I can do."

"Not that I exactly what you'd call need it," said Abner, toying with his new wife's hand so everybody could get a good look at the sparkler she was wearing. "Business ain't been so bad."

He proceeded to tell us how good it was while Ed and Fred ate more cake and Aunt Aggie grew restive. As soon as she could get a word in, she started dropping a few hints about her own family.

"Well, us Harrisons ain't much on braggin' about what we got. Let's talk about somethin' more int'restin'. What was that you was tellin' me, Willie, about James flyin' clear out to California because all them bigwigs out there wanted to hear about the research he's doin'? Even paid 'is fare for 'im an' put a big piece in the paper, didn't they?"

"James, you never told us," cried Lily Ann.

"Oh, one honor more or less doesn't mean much to James," I said. "He's always winning some award or having some head of state or delegation of scholars drop in to offer him another research grant." That was true enough, Carter-Har-

rison's activities being more inscrutable than anybody else's and scholarly veneration for those great brains who are doing that which nobody else can figure out the whereof or whyfor—being ever immense.

"Can't be much money in it," Abner snorted, "or he wouldn't be drivin' that rattletrap out there."

"Oh, that's mine," I said. "My kid brother's, I mean." I felt I owed this to Aunt Aggie. "My Ferrari's in the shop. James never drives himself. It wouldn't be quite the thing, you know, for a man in his position."

That was true enough, anyway. Carter-Harrison was too subject to sudden fits of cerebration to be allowed behind a wheel, but I didn't explain that bit. I was enjoying the smug look on Aunt Aggie's face. Lily Ann was impressed. Abner was irritated. Ed and Fred said they had to go an' practice.

"Practice what?" snapped their mother.

"Pistol shootin'. Volunteer police. You shoot, James?"

James said no, but he wouldn't mind trying. Lily Ann said if there was any shooting she was going home and hide under the chesterfield because guns scared her silly.

"Let's not even talk about horrid old guns. Let's go look at the balloon again."

So we all trooped out to look at the balloon, Ed and Fred strapping on their holsters in a what-the-heck sort of way as we went. As we stood goggling at James's latest miracle of science, Abner Glutch expressed the opinion that it struck him as a mighty bothersome sort of way to hang out a few duds. Furthermore, he didn't see why all that foolishness about letting out the helium was necessary. Why couldn't they just pull it down?

"They did," Aunt Aggie told him. "Ed an' Fred got on one rope an' Willie an' James on the other—"

"Huh! Seems to me a man with a little beef to his bones could do it single-handed."

"I'll bet Abner could," cried Lily Ann.

"He's welcome to try," snarled Carter-Harrison.

"Yep," said Ed and Fred in unison.

So Abner took off his jacket, revealing a pair of lavender suspenders with baby-blue forget-me-nots on them, no doubt a gift from Lily Ann; and hauled. By George, he was a powerful cuss at that. In no time flat, he had Uncle Hector's pantlegs dragging on the ground. Lily Ann applauded enthusiastically, then halted in mid-clap.

"Spotty, you bad boy! What are you—"

She got no further. A shot rang out. Abner Glutch sprawled on the ground. Uncle Hector's dress suit, released from his lifeless grasp, soared again skyward.

As doctors, Carter-Harrison and I dropped at once to our knees beside the fallen man. Diagnosis was no problem. There's something all too obvious about a bullet through the back of the head.

"We'll have to call the police, Aunt Aggie," said Carter-Harrison.

"We're the police," said Ed, or Fred.

"Sort of, anyways," said Fred, or Ed.

"Yes, well." Carter-Harrison groped for words to explain tactfully that it wasn't the done thing for suspects to arrest each other. Before he'd succeeded, Lily Ann screamed and fell into a swoon beside her dead bridegroom.

Aunt Aggie took over. "Pick 'er up, Fred. Take 'er in the house. Step lively. Ed, you call the state troopers. Some dern fool hunter takin' a potshot at that balloon to be cute, I'll be bound."

If I were a mother who had two sons with revolvers strapped to their waists and a grudge against the man who'd married the object of their combined affections, I might have said the

same thing. But why would the hunter have waited till the balloon was on the ground with a group of people clustered around it before he shot?

I was cursing myself for not having made Ed and Fred drop their guns before they took off when I noticed Spotty. Be cursed and be darned if that goat hadn't rolled his oil drum up against the house, directly under the cleats from which Abner hadn't bothered to cast off the guy ropes. He was on top of the drum with his forehooves braced against the clapboards and his neck stretched out like a camel's, yanking down lengths of that new manila line and gobbling them up as if they'd been spaghetti.

"Hey," I yelled, but too late. The balloon was free, traveling low and fast over the treetops on an offshore breeze, carrying with it the clothes reel and Uncle Hector's dress suit. Carter-Harrison leaped to his feet.

"Williams, got your car keys?"

"Yes, but—"

"No buts. Come on."

"The police will think we're running away," I protested as he hustled me into the Chevy.

He didn't bother to answer, just licked his finger and held it out the car window to see how the wind was blowing. "South-southeast by a half east. She can't be making more than three



knots. Full speed ahead to the harbor."

"But if it's blowing out to sea—"

"Step on it."

I could see why he wanted me out of the way. I'd seen gunshot wounds enough during my internship in the emergency room. Abner had been shot from only a short distance, obviously by either Ed or Fred. It didn't matter which. The twins would both ditch their guns before the state troopers arrived, get hold of two others—it wouldn't be hard in hunting country—and swear those were the ones they'd been carrying. Aunt Aggie would back them up. Lily Ann wouldn't know the difference. The bullet would never be traced. Aunt Aggie's yarn of somebody taking a wild potshot at the balloon would hold. I was abetting a murder.

I knew it, and I kept going. I gunned that old can for all she was worth, praying the tires wouldn't pop or the engine fall out. We hurtled over rock and sand, through potholes and ditches, finally made it over the rise, and spied the balloon.

"Thar she blows!" cried Carter-Harrison. "Faster, Williams."

There was nothing ahead of us but a sharp slope and a lot of water. I whizzed downhill with my foot on the gas and my

heart in my brakes, skidded out onto a wooden deck, and managed somehow to stop two feet from the end. Dead ahead of us, Uncle Hector's clawhammer coat was skimming the wave-tops. Beside us, a lone lobsterman was standing in his boat with his mouth wide open and his eyes bulging. Again, Carter-Harrison grabbed my arm and hurled me aboard.

"Follow that clothes reel," he barked.

The lobsterman stared at Carter-Harrison, at the balloon, and at the twenty-dollar bill which I, with a flash of psychological insight, was waving under his nose. I added a second twenty. He nodded once, and cast off.

Out we pounded, into the chop. The clothes reel skipped along in front of us. Sometimes it was almost within our reach, then a ruffle of wind would send it skimming on ahead.

"Uncle Hector always was an exasperating old devil," muttered Carter-Harrison.

"I think I'm getting seasick," I said.

"Comin' on to blow," said the lobsterman.

With that, Carter-Harrison grabbed a boathook, poised it like a harpoon, and let fly. There came a giant pop, then a tangle of canvas and clothesline lay sprawled on the water.

"Oh, jolly good shot," I yelled.  
"She's goin' down," grunted the lobsterman.

"Pole's too well balanced," groaned Carter-Harrison. Waiting not to repine, he tore off his windbreaker, kicked off his boots, and dived. Seconds later, his hand popped up among the wreckage, waving Uncle Hector's clawhammer coat like a soggy banner.

"Catch, Williams," he shouted. "I'm going down for the pants."

I retrieved the coat, laid it over a lobster trap, and stood by to help him aboard. As he reappeared, dripping and triumphant, I held out my hands.

"Take these first," he spluttered.

I grabbed the pinstriped bundle, tossed it behind me on the floorboards, and hauled him over the gunwale. "Got a blanket or something?" I asked the lobsterman.

He didn't speak or move, just stood there gaping down at Uncle Hector's trousers.

"Great balls of fire, they're alive!" Carter-Harrison bent and snatched up the writhing garment. Out of the left leg slithered a six-pound haddock.

"Don't s'pose you'd care to set 'em again?" suggested the lobsterman.

"No," said Carter-Harrison through chattering teeth. "I

think we've caught what we're after."

He shook the pants again. Out of the hip pocket dropped a gun, one like Ed's or Fred's, but it wasn't Ed's or Fred's. On the butt were carved in fancy letters the initials C.H.

"C.H.," I gasped. "Not—not Carter—"

"No, not Carter. Claude. Claude Harrison."

"You don't mean Lily Ann—"

"Oh yes." Carter-Harrison had got his windbreaker around him now, and taken a medicinal snort out of a flat bottle the lobsterman produced from behind the bait tub. "It was obvious from the start. Lily Ann, as you must have noticed, is a remarkably attractive woman. I asked myself what somebody like her could see in an oaf like Claude."

"You asked Ed and Fred, too," I reminded him.

"So I did. They didn't know, either. Therefore, there could be only one reasonable answer."

"Fifty acres of prime seaweed," I cried.

"Precisely. Claude then died under circumstances that would have been considered mysterious if Claude hadn't been such a clumsy lout and Lily Ann such a persuasive weeper. The widow was free to reopen negotiations with Abner Glutch,

which she now believes herself, no doubt, to have concluded satisfactorily. She probably didn't intend quite such a brief honeymoon, but the chance came up and she took it. We needn't waste any blame on ourselves for providing the opportunity, Williams. If the fortuitous combination of the clothes reel, the balloon, and Uncle Hector's dress suit hadn't provided her with a way to get rid of the murder weapon, she'd have thought of something else."

"I don't doubt it," I agreed. "Lily Ann must be a pretty darn smart operator, to have hauled out that gun and shot Abner, then ditched it in the old man's suit and kicked the oil drum over to where the goat could reach the ropes, all without anybody's noticing."

"I expect she had the gun already in her hand," said Carter-Harrison. "I noticed she had her hands tucked up inside the sleeves of that loose, fluffy coat she was wearing when we went outside. It's a natural thing for a woman to do on a chilly day, so why should anyone have thought anything of it? Then she yelled at the goat, and we all automatically turned our heads to look at him. That gave her a chance to shoot Abner. Of course he became the center of interest while she did her other little chores and pulled a faint

so we wouldn't find her lacking in properly wifely concern. Well, we'd better get back to the house before she marries Ed or Fred."

I shook my head. "It won't be Ed or Fred. If you ask me, Lily Ann's looking forward to marrying a rich and famous doctor from Boston. Maybe I laid it on a bit thick."

"Good God!" Carter-Harrison picked up the haddock, wrapped it thoughtfully in Uncle Hector's coat, laid it back with the pants, and took another swig from the lobsterman's bottle. "Well," he sighed, "some day perhaps I'll meet a woman who loves me for myself alone."

He was moody all the way home, sitting there with the haddock, the pistol, and Uncle Hector's suit in his lap. When we got there, Aung Aggie was still doctoring Lily Ann for hysterics while the state troopers stood around looking helpless. When we showed them the revolver that had come out of Uncle Hector's hip pocket, though, and explained the modus operandi by which we believed it to have got there, Lily Ann recovered fast and demanded to be allowed to call her lawyer. They said she could do it from the station. She began to cry again, but it didn't seem to be helping her much. State troopers are smarter than men like

Claude and Abner Glutch.

As they departed, Aunt Aggie faced her nephew, tight-lipped.

"Well, James, you've really done it this time."

"But, Aunt Aggie," he protested, "what else could I do? That woman would have wiped out half of Beagleport and never batted an eyelash if somebody hadn't stopped her."

"I ain't sayin' you was wrong. I'm just remindin' you of how Claude's father's will was wrote. When he died, the farm went to Claude. When Claude died, it went to Lily Ann. But a murderer ain't allowed to profit from 'er crime, which means Lily Ann never inherited at all. An' that means it comes back to us. An' that means the whole shebang, includin' that gol-dern goat."

"Oh gosh, Aunt Aggie," cried Carter-Harrison, as well he might. "Well, never mind. I'll think of something."

"Do me a favor," said his aunt. "Quit thinkin'. Now git on upstairs an' take off them wet clothes."

So that was that and there we were: Ed and Fred out in the back yard building a goat house for Spotty, James crouched beside the stove wearing an old

flannel nightshirt of his Cousin Raymond's and soaking his feet in a pail of hot water and mustard, Aunt Aggie boning the haddock for chowder. Nobody was saying anything. I felt uncomfortable.

Finally I broke the silence. "Say, James, you know those things they have at the laundromat, that you put a quarter in and—"

He was alive again, his eyes flashing, his flannel-clad arms flailing, his feet spraying mustard water all over the carpet. "That's it! Aunt Aggie, have you a mail order catalog in the house?"

"I expect likely." She rubbed the fish smell off her hands with a hunk of cut lemon and went to get it. "Goin' to order yourself a new brain, James?"

"No, by thunder, I'm going to order you an automatic clothes dryer."

"A clothes dryer? Why, I never—well, now, that just might—you know, James, I always did suspicion there might be a speck o' common sense under all that intellect o' yours. Willie, go call in the twins an' tell 'em to get cleaned up for supper. I think it's about time we cooked you city folks a decent lobster."

FICTION

# Tell Me Where Peggy Is

by Donald Olson



Illustration by Jim Ceribello

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In high school Midge and Peggy were too far apart on the popularity scale to be close friends, Midge the bookworm and Peggy the beauty queen. That Peggy had subsequently ended up in New York as, according to her aunt, "private secretary to a big executive" was not very surprising, but that Midge, so plain and shy and afflicted with a mild nervous condition, should tackle the big city indicated more gumption than her friends and family gave her credit for. "Sometimes I think I don't know you at all," was her mother's reaction. "What on earth are you trying to prove?"

A week after Midge's arrival, she called Peggy to tell her about the department store job she had landed and the dinky, furnished, two-room flat she had rented; Peggy dutifully invited her to her own uptown apartment for drinks but thereafter showed no interest in nurturing the friendship. Thus it came as a pleasant surprise when, weeks later, Peggy arrived unexpectedly one evening at Midge's cheerless hole-in-the-wall, pronounced it "ghastly," and wondered if Midge would do them both a favor.

"I could ask someone else, but I need a person I can trust. I'm having a spot of trouble with a guy who won't take no for an

answer. A godawful pest, you know, and I thought I'd go away for a month. I've got vacation time coming, and I'd like someone to watch the apartment. It would be perfect for you. Just a hop and a skip from your work. No beastly subway every morning and night. What do you think?"

Midge was too flattered to refuse, and the chance to occupy such an apartment, even if only for a month, was too tempting to resist. It was in a converted brownstone in the East Fifties: marble fireplace, plush carpeting, exotic plants, quite good reproductions on the walls, a small modern kitchen and bath.

"Just pack a bag and we'll get out of this dump," said Peggy.

"You mean *now*? I don't know, I'll have to tell the super and—"

"I'll run down and tell him while you're packing. It'll save time."

Peggy declined to tell Midge where she was going on her vacation. "If you don't know, you won't have to lie to anyone. Anyone asks, just tell them I'm on holiday and will be back at the end of the month."

Once alone in the apartment, Midge found it easier to relax than in Peggy's somewhat overpowering presence. This was how she had visualized New York living, and with mounting envy she explored the



apartment from the well-stocked bar and freezer to the crowded, spacious closet. It would be fun living here, pretending it was her own place. And Peggy was right, she could walk to work now, it was that close.

Furthermore, Midge was less lonely in Peggy's apartment, which boasted both a TV and stereo system, and the phone rang frequently; although, of course, none of the calls was for Midge, it was amusing trying to imagine faces to match the voices, usually male, who asked for Peggy and quickly rang off. The occasional visitors were also mostly male and invariably handsome, causing Midge to wish that one or two of them would linger, accept her offer of coffee or a drink. None of them did.

Before long, she was not only trying on Peggy's expensive clothes but even worked up the nerve to wear some of them to work, enjoying that feeling of confidence that only costly apparel can inspire. In the middle of that first week the phone rang one evening, and when Midge explained about Peggy's being away, the man said, "So where is she?"

"I honestly don't know. She didn't tell me where she was going."

Instant disbelief: "Oh, come on. You're apartment sitting

for her and she didn't tell you where she could be reached?"

"No, she did not."

"Suppose something happened. An emergency. You saying you wouldn't be able to reach her?"

"That's correct," replied Midge stiffly, somewhat affronted by the man's tone. "Who shall I say called?"

"Forget it." The man hung up, leaving Midge to wonder if this was the fellow who had been such a nuisance.

And then something rather peculiar happened. Midge came home from work one afternoon and sensed, the moment she entered the apartment, that Peggy was there. The distinctive scent of her costly perfume pervaded the room. Midge's heart sank. How awful if Peggy had changed her plans and this agreeable interlude were to be cut short.

Midge paused inside the door. "Peggy?"

No answer. The apartment was empty, although Midge spotted a wine glass on the kitchen counter and in the bathroom the mat was damp and a towel hung over the side of the tub. The aroma of Peggy's bath oil was even more palpable than the trace of scent. Obviously Peggy had been there and gone without leaving any note of explanation. Odd, thought Midge as she fixed her

dinner and listened to music while eating, trying to recapture that pleasant mood of cosy luxury so relaxing to her nerves. The atmosphere, however, seemed disturbed by something too subtle to define. The phone rang once that evening, late, after Midge had crawled into Peggy's canopied bed.

"Peggy?"

The same voice. Midge said, "I told you before, Peggy's away. She won't be back until the end of the month."

"Then tell me where she is."

"I told you. I don't know."

"It's urgently important I get in touch with her. Now stop kidding around. Tell me where Peggy is."

The voice evoked an image of Peggy's typical beau—she preferred dark, big-shouldered men with brooding personalities. "I got hung up on Heathcliff when I was in high school," she had once quipped. Now Midge discerned not so much a brooding quality in the voice as a darkly menacing note.

"I'm sorry," she said primly. "I haven't even a phone number where she can be reached."

On the foregoing days Midge had tarried until the last possible minute before leaving the apartment, as if wanting to savor every second of her occupancy; however, that next morning she left earlier than

necessary, feeling a desire to be among people, to hear the gossip clamor of her fellow workers. By day's end, this sense of nervous unease had evaporated, and she ran up the stairs to the apartment almost gleefully, picturing the pleasant, solitary evening ahead of her: music while she ate, TV, her book, and there was some mending she had to do.

Even before she turned the key in the lock, she heard the stereo from inside the apartment, and when she opened the door, the melody of one of Peggy's favorite records filled the air as disturbingly as had the scent of her perfume. Midge's mood of carefree delight vanished, as this time she felt certain Peggy must be there. Her sense of dismay was all the more acute, as a result, when she discovered the apartment again to be empty. Only this time in the bedroom she noticed the dress she had last seen Peggy wearing draped over a chair and her shoes beside it on the floor. Such typically careless disregard for her clothes left no doubt in Midge's mind that her friend had indeed been there. Presently she discovered more evidence: one of Peggy's lipstick-stained cigarettes lay in the ashtray beside the bed, which held the faint impression of a body on the silk coverlet.

Midge crossed to the phone and stood looking down at it helplessly. Whom could she call? She knew none of Peggy's friends and it would be pointless to phone her office, it would be closed by now. While preparing dinner she tried to reason herself out of this vague presentiment of wrongness. After all, there was nothing to justify the sense of anxiety she felt. That Peggy had wanted to remain clear of the apartment did not mean she had left the country. Maybe she had simply moved to a hotel or in with another friend. At the same time another possible source of her uneasiness made even less sense: it was almost as if she had acquired a proprietary attitude about the apartment, pretending as she had that it was her own; consequently, this nebulous feeling of resentment, as if a stranger had intruded, someone with no right to be there.

She spent the following morning, a Saturday, tidying the apartment, keeping herself busy with a number of nonessential tasks, such as cleaning the cupboards and refrigerator. At least she would be there today if Peggy took it into her head to show up. Midge hoped sincerely that she would, not only because she felt she had a right to some explanation but

because she was lonely. She had made no friends since arriving in New York and by now the novelty of living in the apartment did not altogether compensate for this sense of aloneness.

Peggy, however, did not come, and just as Midge was trying to decide whether to go for a walk, the door buzzer sounded. She hurried to open the door without even bothering to look first through the peephole.

Heathcliff he was not, but decidedly good-looking: tall and lissom with shortish curly red hair and brightly inquisitive green eyes. The moment he spoke, identifying himself as Greg Bowers, a friend of Peggy's, Midge recognized the voice. She introduced herself and invited him in. He wasted no time in stating his business.

"Look, Miss Farwell, I know you told me more than once on the phone that you had no idea where Peggy is. I don't mean to be offensive, but this is very important. Were you telling the truth?"

"Yes! I know I should probably have insisted on at least a phone number where I could reach her, but—well, it all happened so fast. I mean my moving in here. And Peggy made it clear she didn't want anyone to know where she would be."

The young man's penetrating

gaze disconcerted her. "Do you mind telling me," he said politely, "why she didn't want anyone to know?"

Midge blushed. If this *was* the nuisance, it would hurt his feelings, and he did have a very sensitive, caring face. Under that steady gaze of his, however, she hadn't the presence of mind to lie. She told him the truth, blushing even more hotly. As if the blush told him what she was thinking, he grinned and shook his head. "Don't worry. I'm not the guy she was trying to avoid—if there was one. She couldn't ordinarily avoid me anyway. We work in the same place."

Presently, Midge found herself making coffee as Greg Bowers continued to press her for information. "Are you absolutely certain she didn't give the slightest clue as to where she was going? Believe me, I have a very good reason for asking. I'd hate to see her get into trouble."

"Trouble?"

"Sorry. I can't explain, but I give you my word it's imperative I find Peggy—the sooner the better. She gave you no clue at all? And she hasn't contacted you?"

Under different circumstances, had she friends of her own she could have confided in, or if Bowers had not impressed

her as an open and sincere young man, Midge might have kept silent. As it was, she found herself saying, "No, she hasn't . . . only, well, it's just so strange, you know."

"What is?"

"Twice now I've come home from work and found that Peggy has been here. I mean, it must have been Peggy." She went on to explain. "It baffles me. Somehow I got the idea—not from anything she said—that she was at least leaving the city on her vacation."

Bowers leaned forward, his gaze even more searching. "You mean she took a lot of clothes and things with her?"

"No . . . well, when we got here that day, she had a bag already packed. A single overnight bag. And she couldn't have taken a lot of clothes or why would she come back and change while I was at work?"

"Good question . . . it could mean good news—or bad, depending. I mean, I'm glad in a way she must still be in the city. I was afraid she might have taken off for parts unknown."

"What do you mean?"

"Sorry again. It's not something I can talk about. Not yet. Look. Would you do this for me. Just in case she comes back again when you're not here, will you leave a note for me?"

Tell her I was here and it's vital she call me. As soon as possible."

As he was leaving he paused at the door. "One more thing, Miss Farwell. Please take my advice and be very careful about opening your door to anyone you don't know."

Midge smiled ruefully. "That would be just about anyone in New York."

"Then don't let *any* strangers in."

"Oh dear, now you're scaring me."

"I don't mean to. I'm just saying it would be wise to be especially cautious."

The young man's visit had done nothing to restore the balance of Midge's already unsettled state of mind. It was all so mysterious. For the first time she found herself almost wishing she were back in that grubby little apartment on the fringe of the Village. Had Bowers not impressed her so strongly with his air of genuine concern and forthrightness she would have dismissed everything he had implied. Peggy in trouble? Beautiful, poised, self-confident Peggy? And what sort of trouble could she possibly be in? Looking back on their two meetings, it only now occurred to Midge to find something mildly suspect in all that had happened. Why *had* Peggy cho-

sen her of all people to apartment-sit for her? Moreover, the decision had obviously been no spur of the moment impulse of friendship, inspired by dismay at the dinginess of Midge's living quarters. And it had happened so hastily. Ordinarily wouldn't one discuss such an arrangement at least a few days in advance? And come to think of it, was it at all consistent with Peggy's character that she should feel obliged to run away simply to discourage an unwelcome admirer? Even in high school Peggy had been smoothly adept at handling the opposite sex.

As she had promised, Midge left the note for Peggy on the kitchen counter before leaving for work Monday morning. That afternoon the note was still there, with no sign of Peggy's having been in the apartment. Not until Thursday did Midge find the note gone, along with signs that Peggy had again used the bath and made a change of clothes. Midge's bewilderment was now mixed with angry resentment. Surely Peggy must have realized that her surreptitious visits must be provoking curiosity if nothing more.

When Greg Bowers called that evening, all Midge could tell him was that the note had been picked up. "Has Peggy

called you?" she asked.

"No! The little idiot. She's playing a very dangerous game and must realize the risk she's running."

Despite Midge's plea, Greg Bowers refused to enlighten her.

That night when she was preparing for bed the door buzzer sounded. Cautiously, Midge peered through the peephole and saw a blue uniform. Fifteen minutes later she was again alone, frozen in a state of shock. Peggy's body had been found at a construction site early that evening, not more than four blocks from the apartment. She had been shot to death.

An hour later, Greg Bowers showed up.

"You've heard?"

Midge nodded. "I still can't believe it. Peggy murdered! It doesn't seem possible. Why, we went to school together. I've known her for years."

"Have you? I wonder if anyone really knew Peggy. I thought I did, or I'd never have used her."

"Used her?"

He drew out his wallet and showed her his I.D. "I can talk about it now. I'm a special investigator with the Crime Commission. For months I've been working undercover at Cabajol, Ltd."

"Where Peggy worked."

"Right. She had access to information I could get in no other way. So I recruited her. In exchange for a favor."

"What sort of favor?"

"She was in love with a guy we sent up for embezzlement. I was able to get his sentence reduced in exchange for her cooperation. She agreed. You see, Cabajol is only a front for organized crime, an agency for laundering and transporting illicit funds. Peggy often served as a courier. We were ready to move in on them when Peggy doublecrossed me—and them. She didn't know we—and her employers—would get on to what she was doing so quickly. She skipped—with a bundle of cash in her possession."

He talked for over an hour, and when he was finished, Midge remained in a daze.

"But why did she stay in the city?"

"Because her man wasn't due for release until the end of the month. She thought she'd be safe till then—but not in her own apartment."

"She was hiding? But where?"

"Who knows? Most likely some out-of-the-way hotel."

"So why did she keep coming back here?"

Bowers shrugged. "Vanity, probably. Slipped in here, maybe in disguise. Bathed and changed clothes."



"But she took some clothes with her."

"Did she? You said she took one overnight bag. I've an idea it held something other than clothes."

Midge's hand flew to her lips. "The money?"

"Fifty thousand in cash."

Midge sadly shook her head.

"You're right. I guess I didn't know her at all."

The very next morning Midge packed her bag and sorrowfully, but with infinite relief, returned to her own dismal lodgings.

The street, the building, the shabby hallway seemed immeasurably more depressing than ever. As she climbed the stairs she had already made up her mind to go back home. New York was not for the likes of her.

She inserted her key and opened the door. The reek of cooking that permeated the stairwell mingled with a sweeter aroma as she entered the tacky living room: the scent of Peggy's perfume. Midge dropped her bag and looked warily about the room, in that instant a great many things becoming clear. Peggy had needed a refuge, a temporary

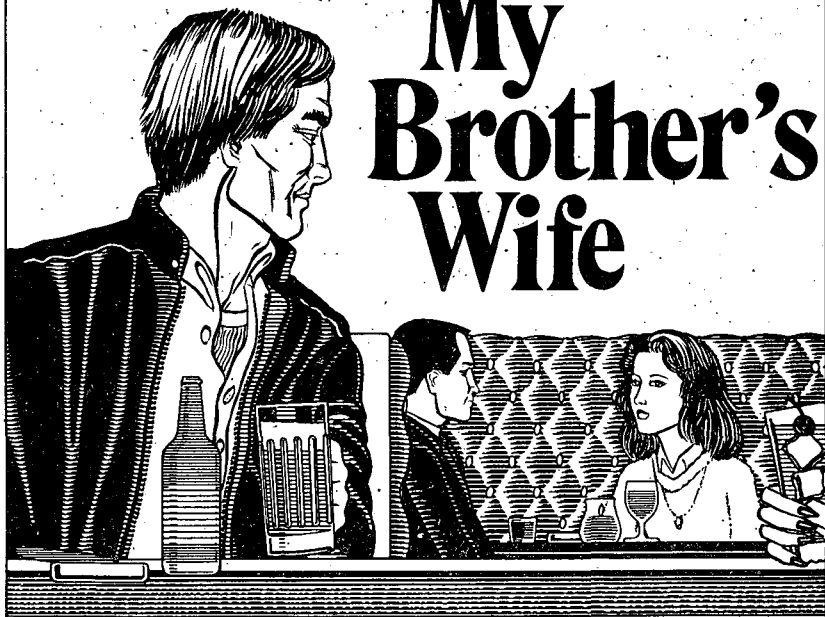
hiding place. And this had been it. No wonder she had wanted to speak to the super while Midge packed. Midge wondered what sort of story Peggy had told him.

Except for that lingering trace of scent Midge found no other evidence of Peggy's occupancy except two ashtrays full of lip-stick-stained butts and a few empty wine bottles. No other evidence, that is, until she opened the closet door and with a sudden tremor recognized Peggy's overnight bag.

She might have done many things thereafter. She might have confided in the police; she might have called Greg Bowers; or she might have packed up and gone home. But did anyone, for that matter, really know Midge Farwell? How well had she known herself?

The following month a new occupant moved into the apartment in the uptown brownstone. She was tidier than the previous occupant, quieter, with fewer male callers. She kept to herself a great deal, and about all the other tenants could have reported about her was that she wore lovely clothes and a happy smile as she set off to work each morning.

# My Brother's Wife



by T. Robin Kantner

**D**on't blame me for not spotting Marybeth sooner. The bar was crowded, I was on a case, and most people, private detectives included, don't notice people in places where they don't expect to see them.

The case was one of those generally dreary prospective-employee background things. I was with a woman named Angie in a bar called Rushing the

*Illustration by Eric Marcus*

Growler, a rompin' stompin' burger and beer joint in the city of Frederick, Michigan. Angie was an ex-squeeze of the investigatee. They'd broken up bad, she was eager to talk, and she was a lady who liked her drinks, so I asked her what she'd have.

"Three Hole Punch," she said to the bartender.

I lighted a cigar and stared into Angie's dark eyes. "What in heaven's name is that?"

She smiled. "The latest thing, Ben. A shot of 151 Bacardi, a shot of dry gin, and a splash of Golden Grain, shaken with pineapple-grapefruit juice over rocks in a tall glass with a maraschino cherry on top."

The bartender set it before her. I swear I saw the cubes smoking. No problem loosening *her* tongue, I thought. I ordered a beer, turned to Angie to begin the casual questioning, and in the far corner of the bar, just visible around the edge of the high back of a booth, I saw Marybeth.

She sat across from a broad-shouldered young man with short, smooth black hair. They were alone, and they were talking, and they didn't see me.

I watched them as I absently probed Angie for information about my subject, information which, under the terrifying momentum of Three Hole Punch, she seemed glad to provide.

As we talked, I considered how perfect Rushing the Growler was for illicit meetings. Loud, crowded, smoky, big booths, lots of little alcoves. I was, after all, here on a somewhat illicit mission myself. The fact that it led to something more personal with Angie—albeit brief—is not important. I could do that. I wasn't married. Marybeth was. To my brother.

Since I got the information I needed from Angie that night, turned in my report the next day, and (not incidentally) got paid, there was no reason for me to go all the way back out to Frederick the next night. But I did anyhow. Marybeth showed up about seven, with her young man in tow. They sat at a secluded corner booth and talked and drank for nearly two hours. She didn't notice me. I wondered what she'd have done if she had.

And I wondered what I was going to do about it. For the next couple of days, I made a brave, determined attempt to do exactly nothing. None of your business, Ben. Stay out of it, Ben. Don't you have enough trouble of your own to handle, Ben? That routine.

But one thing I've never been able to do for very long is kid myself. I know my own cons too well. I'm a nosy bastard is the point. Which is, probably, why I'm a detective. I wondered how other detectives dealt with this kind of situation. Have to bring it up at the next meeting of the Greater Detroit Nosy Bastard Club, private detective division.

A few nights later, I rolled over to the Ford assembly plant in Wayne. A big lazy moon hung high in the hot, black

summer sky as I parked three spaces down from a gleaming, sky blue Ford Econoline van. I nervously smoked a cigar as I waited, leaning against the hood of my Mustang. A bell shrieked from the distant plant, signaling shift-end, and men poured out, fired up their cars, and got the hell out of there. After a couple of minutes my brother Bill Perkins came strolling down the lane toward his van. I raised a hand and he nodded and continued toward me, black lunchbox hanging from one hand.

Bill's eight years older than me. We don't look much alike. He's short, stocky, almost totally bald now, with a narrow face and big nose and squinting eyes. He's placid of face, calm of voice, a man of slow, totally predictable movements. He wore a green shortsleeved dress shirt, snug slacks, highly polished black loafers. "Hey, Ben," he said as he reached me.

"Bill," I nodded. "Buy you a beer?"

"Why sure." I pulled a cold six of Stroh's off the front seat, snapped two loose, handed him one, and popped mine. Bill set his lunchbox on the hood of the Mustang and opened his beer as I leaned an elbow on the ragtop and took a gulp. "What brings you out this way?" Bill asked.

Impossible to answer truth-

fully because I didn't know myself. I mean, I knew, but I wasn't going to blab about having seen Marybeth twice in a saloon with a stranger. I was, so to speak, sounding him out. I didn't know what I expected to get done here, which is a dangerous way to do business. Carole Somers, a trial lawyer acquaintance of mine, says that the cardinal rule of examination is: Don't ask a question unless you already know the answer.

"Haven't seen you in a while," was my lame answer.

"Ee-yeah. Couple-three months. We doing Stapfer on the Fourth again, right?"

"Sure." This was about the only tradition my family had left. When we were boys, our daddy and Uncle Dan always took us fishing on Stapfer Lake on the Fourth of July, which was a couple of days off now. Bill and I continued the tradition even though Daddy died back in '63 and Uncle Dan was permanently disabled and living in a rest home (I mean, retirement community). "Uncle Dan coming along?" I asked.

"Talked to him yesterday," Bill answered. "Said he'd try." Uncle Dan hadn't come with us—had been physically unable to—for fifteen years. But we always invited him, and he always said he'd try.

I dropped my cigar on the dirty pavement and crushed it out with my boot. Over the rim of my beer can, I eyed my brother as I tipped beer into my mouth. His face was shrouded in shadow; his bald head gleamed in the moonlight. He leaned silent, placid, solid as a bridge abutment. I groped for words, for the angle that, in my investigating work, usually came easily, and could think of nothing. Bill was my brother, but as adults we were strangers. The few conversations we had over the course of a year fell into well-worn, predictable patterns. Cars and tools and baseball and the old neighborhood, none of which could help me find out what I wanted (not necessarily needed) to know.

The parking lot was silent now, afternoon men on their fast ride home through the dark, midnight men beginning their shift on the thumping, screaming, hot assembly line inside. Bill broke the silence. "Saw baby sister the other day."

He let the unasked question hang in the air. I hadn't seen Libby in two years, not since our Uncle Andrew died.

With just the slightest shrug, Bill sipped his beer and went on.

"Took off a lot of weight. Looking damn good now. She got her a job counseling in one

of those weight-loss places. Doin' good."

I set my empty beer can on the ragtop, fetched myself a fresh one and, as I popped it, asked casually, "How's Marybeth?"

"Fine, thanks."

"Still working that job out there?"

"City of Frederick police. Right. Just a typist, but the pay's good. You know them civil service jobs."

"Pretty long drive, though."

"Oh well, I-94 straight out, not too bad." Bill drained his beer. "She's staying out at her sister's in Jackson for a few days. Having a little visit, drive to work's a lot shorter from there."

Bill absently drummed his empty beer can with his thick fingers. I asked, "Nother one?"

"Naw, better roll, Ben. Thanks." He handed me his empty, picked up his lunchbox, and headed toward the Econoline with that slow, rolling walk that reminded me so much of Daddy. Over his shoulder he called, "The landing at Stapfer. The Fourth, six A.M. sharp. Got it?"

"Yeah, bro." I gathered up the empties, tossed them into the back of the Mustang, and got out of there.

Driving through the hot night, I thought about Marybeth stay-

ing at her sister's in Jackson. A visit? Or had she left Bill? Or had he thrown her out? And what about the guy she was meeting at Rushing the Growler? What the hell gives here, anyhow?

It was none of my business, but it didn't feel right. I'd have to look into it, keep an eye out, and if something needed fixing, I'd sure God have to fix it.

**I**t wasn't like I was between jobs and had nothing better to do. My big corporate client had six more job applicants who needed checking out, at five hundred per, cash money. Carole Somers had called that morning about a client in Wayne County jail, charged with murder, thought maybe I could help. The outdoor maintenance work at Norwegian Wood was getting pretty intense, this being the height of the summer, lot of work to schedule and ass to kick. But I did as little as I could get away with the next day, drove like hell to Frederick during the supper hour, and by dusk, about the time Marybeth arrived with her Mister Wonderful, I was ready.

My battered old Canon, loaded with a fresh roll of twelve-hundred speed-print, worked great. I shot up all ten frames, getting virtually every angle except from directly overhead,

as Marybeth and the man leaned close together over the table, talking, laughing, drinking drinks, absorbed in each other. Then I strolled out of there, unobserved by both.

I was back the next night, cameraless. I grabbed a stool at one corner of the bar and watched Marybeth and her swain as they went through the routine. The guy must have had a bladder of prodigious capacity because it seemed like hours before he finally excused himself and went to the john. I followed him.

It was empty except for us. While the guy did his business at the far end, I busied myself combing my hair at the mirror, gambling that he was fastidious enough to wash up after. He was. I let him get his hands full of soapy lather before I said, "Think we can do some business, pal?"

He hardly glanced at me as he scrubbed. "Buzz off."

I shook my head regretfully. "Not good." I reached into my hip pocket, pulled out the nice, crisp, three by five color glossy, and dropped it on the aluminum shelf below the mirror in front of him. "That's what I'm selling," I said softly. "You interested?"

The picture was a tight shot of him and Marybeth, noses



inches apart over the rough-hewn booth table in Rushing the Growler. I was quite proud of it. Good focus and composition, sharp and clear, with only available light yet.

He stopped scrubbing and studied the picture as the water rinsed his hands clean. He was a young fellow, younger than Marybeth—she's about my age—dark-haired with deep eyes and a thickly muscled, symmetrical, almost handsome face, the skin of which showed five o'clock shadow. He wore a light gray jacket, open-necked white shirt, and dark slacks. His tan could have come from the sun or a lamp, you just can't tell any more. He shut off the water and flicked the wet off his hands and straightened to face me. He did not look happy.

I said: "For shame. See that ring on your finger? No, not the pinky ring, the one on the *next* finger there. That means you're married, remember? And so's she."

"What's your interest?" His voice was a toneless, husky whisper.

"Not financial, for once. It's just this. Get off her and stay off, and this goes no further."

He nodded, lips pressed tight over his good white teeth. Then he said, "Now I'd like to show *you* something, friend. I'm going into my inside jacket pocket,

real slowly, fingers only. All right?"

I was unarmed and had made no threats of violence, but I nodded. He reached inside his jacket, came out with a small black wallet, and opened it. The badge gleamed, an embossed picture-I.D. next to it. Donald Boltz, special agent, Michigan Bureau of Investigation. I said, with more assurance than I felt right then, "That supposed to mean something important?"

"You know," he said, "there's a thing called obstruction of justice. There's another called interfering with an official investigation. I could mangle you lots of ways, ways you haven't even heard of yet. You follow?"

"I'm scared to death here. Really I am. So humor me."

"I'm on police business," he answered, closing the wallet and putting it away. "There's no funny stuff between her and me. Now, if you don't mind my asking, who in the hell are you?"

For some deep instinctive reason, probably because he would have died laughing, I did not show him my private detective license. I answered, "Ben Perkins. I'm her brother-in-law."

Boltz stared at me. Then he dumped his head back and laughed at the ceiling, even white teeth gleaming in the fluorescent light. I stood impass-

sively, hands folded in front of me, wanting badly for some reason to hit him very hard. When he recovered, he mused, "Isn't that a riot? Out of the way place like this . . . no suspicious eyes . . . her brother-in-law!"

"Yeah. Real thigh-slapper. What I'd like to know is, why is the MBI interested in Marybeth?"

He still smiled, but the humor had fled his eyes. "I don't have to waste my time explaining anything to you. She's your brother's wife, so fine, I've explained there's nothing personal going on and that's all you need to know." Boltz's jaw tightened. "Don't cross my path again. I get upset really easily."

He walked past me, brushing intentionally close, to the door and then out without looking back. I stared at the space he'd left, remembering his casual yet high-quality and expensively tailored suit, his six hundred dollar lizard-skin shoes, the gold pinky ring with diamond chips. For a policeman, Special Agent Donald Boltz seemed to pull down an abundance of disposable income.

**D**ick Dennehy studied the picture through his aviator glasses. He snorted. "So. One of the glamor boys."

"How's that?" I asked.

Dennehy stared at me bleakly. He's a big, somewhat out of shape, grayish blond, wound tight with the cheerful malevolence of the career cop. He wore a gray suit—I believe he buys them by the gross at K-Mart—and the inevitable Lucky straight-end smoldered from the fingers of the hand in which he held the picture. We sat in a booth in Pringle's, the Novi saloon in which we met once a week to straighten out the world.

Dennehy, eyes still on me, dropped the picture. "Glamor boys," he repeated. "I'm with the state police, remember? We're the ones who get called in on cases *after* these glamor-boy clowns with the 'Michigan Bureau of Investigation'"—he snarled the name—"screw them up."

"I get the picture." The barmaid expertly dropped another Signature and rum-and-coke on our table. "Thanks, Cindy," I said absently. "So," I said to Dick as he took a pull from his drink, "since apparently you state police boys don't get along with the MBI, can I assume there's no way you can find out what—or if—Boltz is investigating that involves Marybeth?"

Dick made a gleeful, crooked smile. "O ye of little faith! Sure

I can, my spies are everywhere. Be glad to." He slipped the picture into his jacket pocket, fired up another weed, leaned forward on his elbows, and asked quietly, "You think he's doing the dirty deed to her?"

"Hell, I don't know, Dick."

"What'll you do if it turns out he is?"

"Don't know that, either."

"Huh. Now that we're clear on what you don't know, tell me: what *do* you know, Ben?"

"I know what I feel. I feel like Boltz is a bad act. I got a real bad smell from him. I don't trust him—I don't trust much of anything, any more—but I trust that feeling." I stared over his shoulder at the window that fronted the place. "I feel like I have to watch out for Marybeth, at this point."

"You don't mind my saying so, I didn't think you and your family were particularly close."

"We're not." I met his eyes. "But you still watch out for them."

**T**he next morning I waited at the curb in front of the City of Frederick police department. At ten sharp, Marybeth Perkins came out the big revolving glass door, stopped on the steps, and scanned the street looking for me. She didn't spot me right away because I was right there in plain sight.

Then she grinned, waved, and walked toward me. She passed a tall, gray-haired hump-shouldered uniformed man headed into the building and said cheerfully, "Good morning, Chief Harran." He nodded. I got a good look at him before he disappeared into the building. It isn't every day you get a good look at a chief of police, even of a small burg like Frederick. I was impressed.

It was a brilliantly clear hot day, and I had the Mustang's top down. Marybeth swung into the passenger seat with the agility of a dancer, slammed the door, and said, "I'm on break, I've got ten minutes. Drive." I fired up the motor and rolled away slowly.

Marybeth lighted an Eve cigarette from the dashboard lighter, hung her right elbow out the gunwale of the car, and looked at me. She was tan and freckled, thin and supple, whip-like, energized, and just Bill's height, which explains why she wore shoes like the flat brown dress sandals she had on today. Above that she wore pink snug slacks, and a ruffy white-on-white blouse with a gold pin inserted over her left breast. Her brown hair was a series of waves that ended neatly just above her shoulders. She had a keen mind and, sometimes, a sharp mouth, and I braced myself a

little, wondering why she'd asked me to meet her here.

As I swung right on the Milan road, she said, "Don Boltz told me about your conversation with him."

"Look, it was strictly by accident I saw you two there—"

She interrupted with an edge in her voice. "You thought I was stepping out on Bill."

"The thought crossed my mind. But—"

She waved her hand. "Never mind. I'm going to tell you what Don told me not to tell anybody." She breathed deeply. "I'm helping the MBI investigate our department. On deep background."

I glanced at her. "Funny stuff going on?"

She drew on her cigarette and said quietly, "Worse than that, Ben. It's the chief. He's dirty. Dirty as can be. I've been there eight years, I've seen a lot, and it starts right at the top. Kickbacks, protection, grease, you name it. I looked the other way for a long, long time. Finally it got to be too much. So I contacted the MBI."

"Does Bill know?"

She stared at me, composing her thoughts, and said, "No. Don said not to tell *anybody*. Besides . . . well, you know Bill."

"Sure I do. But go on."

She took a last off-hand hit

from her half-smoked cigarette and flicked it away from the car as I made a right, into an old residential neighborhood and circled a big block, headed back toward the police station. "Bill's very . . . traditional. He's a quiet man. He absolutely detests confrontations. He avoids trouble. He's very dutiful, a good husband, Ben, but underneath he's scared. He worries and frets. He doesn't understand trouble, and he doesn't understand people who get into it. You know what I mean?"

It rang true. It explained part of the narrowness of my relationship with my own brother, the tight groove of conversation limited to cars and tools and baseball and the old neighborhood. Bill had really liked Charlotte, my first serious girlfriend, and never understood why I didn't marry her, had never married anybody. He'd never understood why I left my assembly line job to be a gofer for a union boss. During the endless federal investigation of my boss's racketeering and tax-evasion activities, in which I was a notorious and uncooperative material witness, Bill had refused to speak to me. He found my private detective work incomprehensible and never asked about it. For two guys who'd slept in the same room for better than ten

years, we'd grown about as far apart as two people can get.

I right-turned on red onto a major street. The police station loomed ahead on the right, and I threaded through traffic toward it. Marybeth said pensively, "I don't make a habit of keeping secrets from Bill. But this time I have to, at least till it's over. And I'm asking you not to tell him, either, ever; you let me do it when the time is right. He's your brother, but I'm his wife, and I'm calling the shots. You've got to help me."

I stopped in front of the station and turned to her. "Of course I'll help you. Anytime, anywhere, anyhow."

She had her door half-open when she froze, turned, leaned over and kissed me. I gave her a squeeze and patted her back. She was warm and smelled good, but it was brother-sister stuff, no more. I eased her away and said, "Just one thing. I know the street, I know this work. Something doesn't feel right about this thing; this Boltz fellow. You take real good care, Marybeth. Stay in touch." I grinned. "I don't mind trouble. It's what I do."

She smiled, nodded, got out, and walked across the sidewalk toward the door. "I'll be watching out for you," I called.

I held the tester up and ex-

amined the colors. The pH was right on, the chlorine a tad down. I threw three concentrated chlorine eggs into the skimmer, screwed down the lid, and headed back to Building One of Norwegian Wood as a battalion of kids carrying towels and flotation devices screamed out the side door toward the pool. The phone in the maintenance office was ringing when I got there. It was Dick Dennehy.

"You hollered?" he asked.

"I got the story already. MBI's investigating the Frederick P.D. It's dirty, top to bottom; the chief included. Right?"

"Wrong," he answered equally.

"No, I'm not. Marybeth told me all about it." I drew up short as Dick's meaning sunk in. "No word of it out there?"

"Nope. Nothing like that. Boltz is a soldier, nothing more. His thing is chop shops, bad-check artists, stuff like that. Listen, Ben, Boltz isn't senior enough to be doing something like a background inquiry into a police department. Even if he was, he wouldn't be doing it alone. There'd be a task force. And the state police would probably be doing it, not the MBI." Static whirled in the line for a second. "This smells like leftover fish, pal."

The phone receiver felt very

warm and damp in my hand. I struggled to sound certain, and failed. "Maybe your contacts are uninformed."

"Don't underestimate me. My contacts are top-siders. They'd know, no matter how quiet it was. Whatever Boltz is up to, he's in business for himself."

"I don't like the sound of it."

"You'll like *this* even less. Boltz is thought of as an operator. A little fast, a little flashy, they think he's been off the reservation more than once, if you catch my drift, only they've never gotten the goods on him. No idea what his game is right now, but if I was you, it being the sister-in-law involved, I'd be extra careful."

"I'll do that, Dick. Thanks."

"Chalk up one to that instinct of yours."

"I'll take a bow later, if it's all right with you. You, uh, you want a piece of this, maybe?"

"Thought you'd never ask. Hell, I'd like nothing better than to find dirty hands on an MBI guy. Tell you what. In this deal, the Michigan State Police is at your service. You just let me know, and we'll, like, charge over the hill to the sound of bugles, flags streaming."

**F**ortunately, it was a weekend. Everything was under control at Norwegian Wood, and my cor-

porate client didn't expect progress on his applicants till Monday. So I had plenty of time for real excitement: following Donald Boltz around.

He worked at the MBI substation in Adrian. He lived in a swanky lakefront condo near there. He drove thirty-plus G's worth of loaded Audi 5000. I literally took up residence in my Mustang. I lived on drive-through Wendys and Macs, washed up in gas station johns, slept stiff and cramped across the bucket seats, and tailed Boltz real smooth, real careful.

Problem was, he didn't go anywhere, or do anything, suspicious.

By Sunday evening I was a wrinkle-clothed, sore-muscle, aromatic, exhausted mess. And for it I had to show exactly nothing. And though he'd gotten in his car in the late afternoon and set off northeast, in the general direction of Detroit, my initially rising excitement dimmed considerably when he ended up at the K-Mart in Westland. K-Mart, for God's sake.

He knew what I looked like, so I hung way back from him in the crowded store as he strolled back to the men's clothes area and began browsing. I kept several rows of clothes between us, engaged with him in a long-distance, surreptitious



dance of surveillance, while he leafed in a casual, almost bored fashion through racks of trousers and shirts and jackets. Suddenly—a little *too* suddenly, considering how lackadaisical he'd been operating till then—he selected a snappy green blazer and a pair of green-checked slacks and walked swiftly to a pair of freestanding dressing closets. The one on the left was closed and occupied; the other one was open, and he locked himself inside.

Crowds swirled around me. Muzak blared from loudspeakers, interrupted by an announcer pitching blue-light specials. Moms herded gaggles of kids. Teenage girls in cutoffs and tanktops floated along in a daze of nubile youth. I watched the closets for what seemed like a long time. Then the door on the left opened and a man stepped out. Tall, gray-haired, hump-shouldered, dressed casually in civilian clothes. Carl Harran, chief of police, City of Frederick.

He looked around quickly, then walked away into the crowd while I stared at him, frozen.

After a minute, the right-hand door opened and Donald Boltz came out. His hands were empty except for a business-sized envelope which he tucked into his inside jacket pocket as he strutted toward the front of

the store and away.

The single pay phone at the entrance to the store was being used by a skinny teenage kid in a whacked-off T-shirt and jogging shorts, grinning and whispering into the receiver as he leaned against the glass wall. I took the receiver away from him with one hand, handed him a quarter with the other, growled, "Call her back in a minute," then broke the connection and began to dial as he stared incredulously at me. The phone rang in my ear as the kid started to say something, but one look from me stifled him. Finally the ringing stopped and Marybeth said, "Hello?"

Thank God.

**W**e slogged ankle-deep up the steep incline of an enormous sand mountain. Beyond us sprawled the dunes and rubble piles and the cratered landscape of the abandoned sand and gravel quarry. The rusted snout of a huge crane reached high into the black sky. A couple of tin buildings, roofs sagging, stood sentry at opposite ends of the flat, sandy yard far, far below us. There was no one there. We stopped at the bluff and stepped back, panting from the exertion, Dick Dennehy most of all.

Jerry Mooney, Dennehy's

squat, short, bull-shouldered partner (the term "brick outhouse" was coined with him in mind), adjusted the strap of his walkie-talkie, checked his watch, and said in a hoarse whisper, "Ten minutes to three. Ten minutes to three A.M., on the Fourth of July. Jesus Christ." He looked at me in the darkness. "Your theory better hold up, Perkins."

I retorted, "All I know is, Marybeth told me that Boltz told her to meet him here tonight. Something real fishy's going on, believe me. Anyhow, if I'm right, for you state police guys it'll be a dream come true. You'll catch an MBI guy engaged in a criminal act."

"He's right, Jerry," Dennehy said.

"Don't worry," I added. "If this works out, I don't want any credit for it, hear? It's your collar."

"*Our* collar?" Dennehy snorted. "Hear that, Jer?"

"I heard that. Hee-hee. *Our* collar. Right."

Dennehy checked the time. "Everybody in place?"

"Oughtta be," Mooney answered. He slogged through the sand to the bluff, peered over, and said tensely, "Whoa. Here she comes."

Dennehy and I crawled to the bluff, flanking Mooney, and looked down. Marybeth's light-

blue Escort sedan, lights off, rolled down the narrow, weedy, sandy lane from our right and parked next to one of the tin buildings.

Jerry Mooney whispered into his walkie-talkie. Dennehy kept his eyes on the woman, who wore a light poplin raincoat, as she got out of the Escort and stood alongside it, and got out his gleaming Colt Python. My heart was thumping as I pulled my .45 automatic from the waistband against my spine and cocked it. There was no need to work the action; I carried a live round under the hammer.

The woman leaned against the door of the Escort, face indistinct in the half-moonlight, layered brown hair flowing down to her shoulders. An engine hummed from our right and a black Mercury sedan approached the tin building and stopped near the Escort. Its engine kept running as the driver's door opened and a man got out.

The moonlight caught the man's features and I said, "That's not Boltz! It's Harran!"

Chief Carl Harran wheeled, raised a .38 revolver over the roof of the Mercury, and shot the woman five times. The flares from the snout of the revolver flashed well in advance of the boom of the shots. The woman went down.

"Let's do it!" Mooney shouted into the walkie-talkie. As the three of us charged over the bluff and down the sandy slope, a siren wailed to our right, and two state police cars roared up the lane toward the chief, headlights illuminating him as he jerked his head around wildly. From our left, another police car swerved on the sandy lane toward him, cutting off that escape route. He hurled his empty revolver away and ran diagonally to our right. I skidded to a halt, dropped to a crouch, and fired three times. Even in the hands of a marksman, which I am not, the .45 auto is ineffective at that range, but the plumes of sand from the heavy slugs bursting around him were convincing, and he skidded to a halt and sprawled into the weedy sand. The cars stopped, the doors flung open, and the policemen converged on him, weapons extended warily.

Breathing hard, I dropped my gun hand to my side and walked over to the Escort. Up this close, the woman looked little like Marybeth. She was on her feet, the bullet-riddled raincoat open, showing the heavy pleated armored vest. I grinned at her and she grinned back and gave me the thumb's up. Behind me, a woman's voice called, "Ben?" and I turned and Marybeth Perkins, who'd been

in the back of one of the state police cars, waved and ran into my arms so hard she nearly knocked me down. I held her and she held me and we said nothing, but when she finally stepped back, my cheeks were wet from her tears.

Dick Dennehy came up to us as Jerry Mooney directed the loading of the chief into one of the cars by the other officers. "Harran's singing like a bird," he told us grimly. "Boltz sold Marybeth out to Harran as an informant in return for ten big ones. Jerry 'n' I are going to pick Boltz up now. Fun, fun! Wanna come along?"

"I do," Marybeth said.

I checked my watch. "Not me, thanks. I got a date."

"At four in the morning?" Dick demanded.

"Fishing," I grinned. "See y'all."

It was five after six and the sky was brightening fast when I arrived at the landing on Stapfer Lake. Bill's green seventeen-footer with its Chrysler outboard bobbed in the water at the end of the landing. His blue Ford Econoline van dragging the empty trailer was parked in a V on the gravel lot. Bill Perkins himself sat patiently on the rear bumper of the van, wearing a narrow-brimmed canvas hat, cham-

bray shirt, dark blue slacks, and knee-length rubber boots. He looked at me calmly as I walked up to him. "You're late," he said.

"Sorry."

He rose and we walked down to his boat. It was fully equipped with two sets of tackle, a full bait buckle, nets and anchors and extra gas and oil and all the rest. Good old thorough Bill. As he made ready to cast off the boat, I said, "Reckon Uncle Dan's not coming, huh?"

"Reckon not."

I climbed clumsily into the

boat. "One of these days, Bill."

He gripped the transom, dug his boots into the wet sand, shoved the boat out into the water, and climbed nimbly in. "Yeah, bro. One of these fine days."

We fished all day, didn't catch much, and talked about cars, tools, baseball, and the old neighborhood. Back at his house, we devoured Marybeth's terrific steak dinner, and I got home early. I don't know if she ever told Bill the Harran/Boltz story or not. I've never asked. It's none of my business.

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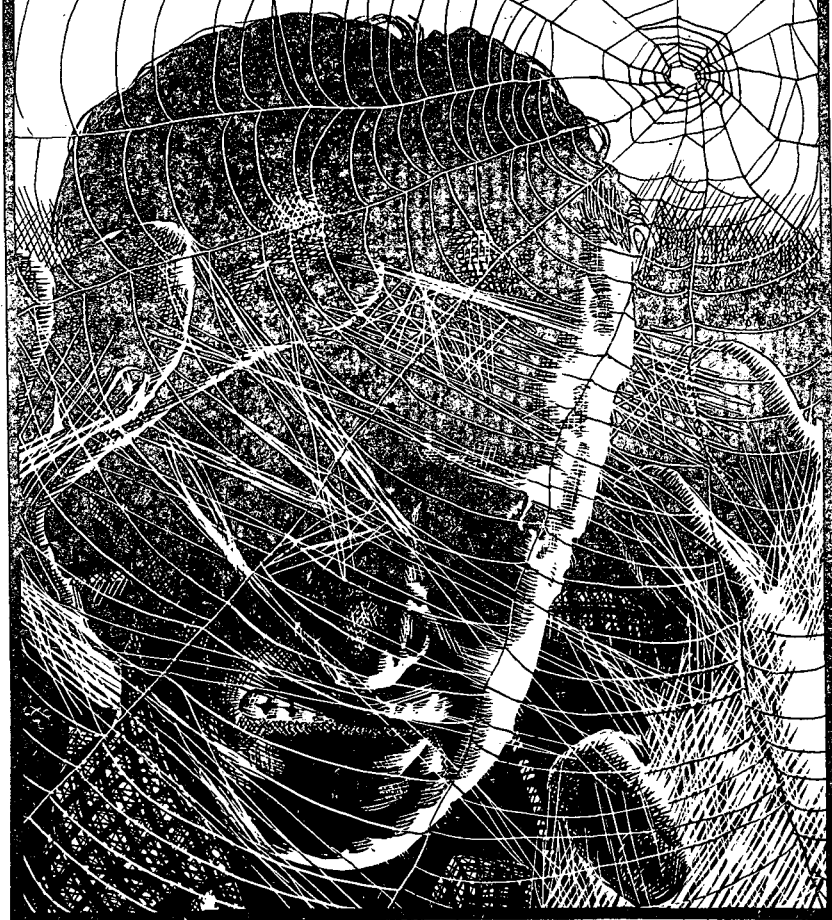
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KATHY TULLY-CESTARO  
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR, SUBSCRIPTIONS

FICTION

# SPIDER-SPIDER

by Michael Beres



*Illustration by Nicola Cuti*

Unlike Mrs. Black, Mr. Black was not one to allow weeds to take over the lawn or the garden. Unlike Mrs. Black, Mr. Black was not one to shrug at the occasional insect in the corner of the basement or the even rarer appearance of an insect on the main floor of the house. Mr. Black was a fanatic when it came to keeping things tidy, especially now in the third year of his retirement. Mrs. Black often said that Mr. Black was as finicky as an old woman. So when Mr. Black saw several long spider webs bridging the gap between the house and the back yard Russian olive tree, he became enraged.

Mr. Black used a broom to down the spider threads connecting the tree to his house. The tree branches shook as he tore down the spider silk. Some threads were strong enough to carry the weight of the small broom and Mr. Black had to swing the broom high above his head to remove them. In the alley he used a rag to clean off the broom. Some of the spider silk adhered like slime to his hands. He gave up trying to clean the broom and threw it and the rag into a garbage can. He knew that Mrs. Black would see the broom handle sticking out of the can and retrieve it before garbage day. She would again lecture him about wasting their retirement savings while *she* hoarded coins in her cookie jar to pay dues at her stupid theater club.

After washing his hands and arms in the basement, Mr. Black went into the garage and surveyed the shelves of paint and cleaners and insecticides. He searched among the cans of ant and roach spray, the cans of plant and garden dust. He read the labels. Ants, clover mites, crickets, earwigs, sowbugs. When he finally found a spray can that said it controlled spiders, the can was nearly empty. So Mr. Black drove to the local garden center, which Mrs. Black said he supported with all his unnecessary purchases of fertilizers and insecticides. He waited in his car in the hot morning sun until the store opened at nine. When he arrived home he had spent his weekly ten dollar allowance from his retirement check, but at least now he was armed.

He lined the cans up on the workbench in the garage and reread the labels. He concocted a detailed extermination plan. One can would be used to spray along the windowsills. A can of granular material would be spread along the foundation and under the tree. He would need the stepladder for a third can; this he would spray under and into the rain gutters. He decided upon a full-fledged offensive. This way he could hide the empty cans deep in the gar-



bage so that Mrs. Black would not see how much money he had spent.

He went into the back yard armed with the first can. He had thought he would catch the spider, or spiders, off guard. But new threads had already been spun between the tree and the house. Some of the threads were over six feet long and he wondered how the spiders—there had to be more than one—had managed to bridge the gap in such a short time on a windless morning. He imagined a large spider swinging from the tree like Tarzan on a vine. No. The threads were higher on the house side, the silk spun as spiders swung from the house to the tree.

Mr. Black retrieved the broom from the garbage and knocked the webs down. The threads were more resilient this time, forcing him to swing the broom several times. He wondered what kind of spider could spin silk of such strength. No matter. The labels on the cans guaranteed death to all types of spiders.

While he was spraying along the sill of the kitchen window, he heard Mrs. Black cough before the window was slammed shut from the inside. As he sprayed the rain gutters from his stepladder perch, he became dizzy from holding his breath and had to brace himself against the house to keep from falling.

Mr. Black slept well that night, comforted by thoughts of his house nestled in the protection of various chemicals having hard-to-pronounce names. Mr. Black dreamed of freshly waxed basement linoleum, of bristly living room carpet and shiny, tight-fitting oak floors. In the morning, as he lay awake listening to Mrs. Black preparing breakfast in the kitchen, he thought of tomatoes and green peppers spotless and free of insects. While taking his morning bath he relished his victory over these miniature monsters who wore their skeletons unnaturally on the outside. Mere shells that could do nothing but hunt and eat one another, instincts for brains.

But when Mr. Black went into his yard that morning the webs were back. And there were more webs this time. A dew had settled during the night and the sparkling threads mocked him. This time the silk seemed thicker, and instead of stretching from high on the house, the threads led from the tree down to the sill of the basement window. And the basement window had been left open! Mr. Black ran to the garage where he knew there was one half-filled can of insecticide. Then he went to the basement landing. If he had seen Mrs. Black on his way, he would have cursed her for leaving the window open.



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Because he had been outside in the sun, the stairwell was dark. He could smell the dampness rising from the basement, the dehumidifier unable to overcome an open window. His hand caught on something slimy on the railing. He stopped on the stairs and held his hand up to the light on the landing. Spider webs! His hand covered with spider webs!

Mr. Black wiped his hands on his trousers, already planning to change clothes and bathe again as soon as his work was complete. He held the can before him and waited for his eyes to adjust to the dark basement.

Then he heard it. Something under the stairs. A faint scraping sound. He peered between the unbacked risers of the stairs and saw only blackness. But on his ankles he saw more spider silk, threads wrapped where he had walked into them.

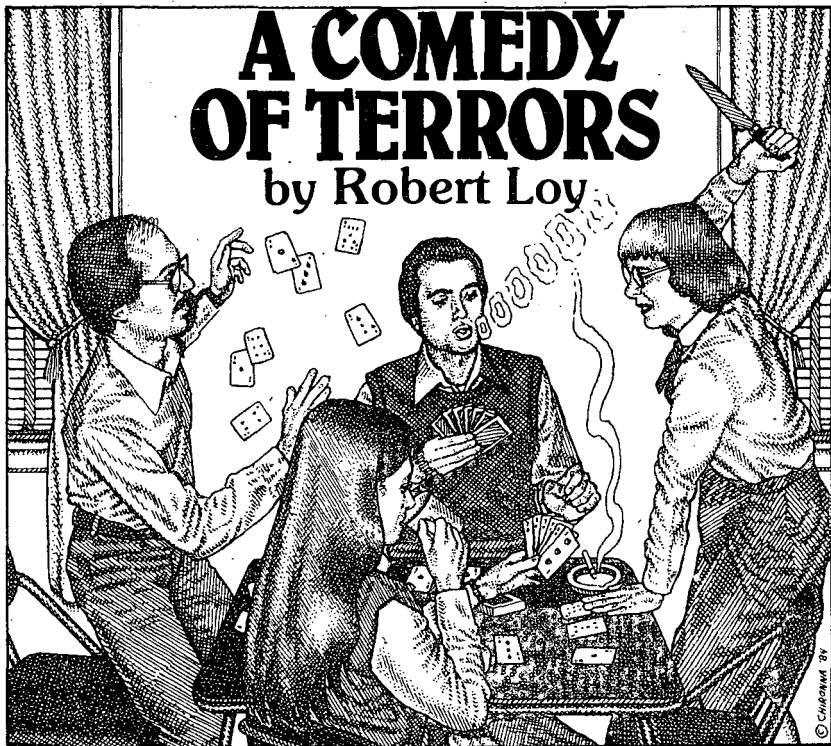
Very slowly, the can of spray held ready, he bent and pulled at the largest thread. At first it pulled loosely, the thread coming up from beneath the stairs. And then there was a tug at the thread, a pull like a child might make. Mr. Black imagined a spider as large as a child and dropped the thread.

The pain in his chest grew and spread as he ran up the stairs. A tug at his ankle almost tripped him. Mr. Black ran through the kitchen into the living room. He tried to call for Mrs. Black, but no sounds came from his burning throat. The last thing Mr. Black saw before the final explosion in his chest was the freshly vacuumed nap of the carpet where he fell.

At the funeral home, Widow Black was comforted by her children and her sister. Widow Black was wearing a black shawl. Some of Widow Black's friends from the local thespian society, to which she belonged, sat discreetly near the back of the viewing room. The friends spoke in whispers that were unheard up front nearer the casket. They spoke of Mr. Black's inability to occupy himself since his retirement. They spoke of the black shawl that Widow Black wore, how Widow Black had knitted the shawl herself out of the finest yarn. They spoke hopefully of Widow Black's becoming more involved in the thespian society, now that Mr. Black was dead. Widow Black was an expert at creative set design, and since Mr. Black carried ample life insurance, Widow Black would surely become more involved in designing sets for the younger players. Though her husband's death was a severe setback, they all knew that Widow Black was a strong woman.

# A COMEDY OF TERRORS

by Robert Loy



*For your race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon—laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution—these can lift at a colossal humbug—push*

*it a little—weaken it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.*  
—Mark Twain

**B**arry Jordan was angry. He was so angry he was oblivious to everything but his own fury. He did not hear the muttered curses of the fat lady whose feet he flattened on his relentless march

out of what had become, for him, a torture chamber. He did not feel the sticky ghosts of Coca-Colas spilt long ago that clutched at his heels and tried to force him to remain. He did not see his wife Myrna mumble

Illustration by Ron Chironna

something to the couple sitting near her, and then get up and follow him down the aisle. He was unaware of his next door neighbors, Ed and Dorothy Willis, slumping into their plush seats, and pretending not to know the man who was so boorish as to walk out on such a vivid and skillfully directed axe murder.

Barry took a deep breath as he walked through the door and out into the November night. Unpolluted air rushed in and made a valiant effort to cleanse the taste of blood and popcorn from his palate; but Barry would not have it. He did not lose his temper often, but when he did he rather enjoyed its absence. He was in a miserable mood now, and he was not about to let a little fresh air spoil it. He quickly exhaled, and his righteous indignation remained intact. He strode through the mall parking lot like Saint Francis departing a bullfight.

He marched straight to the passenger side of his Chevrolet Malibu, opened the door, and waited for Myrna to get in. He knew she would be behind him, although he had not turned around to verify her presence. She climbed in without a word, and Barry walked around to the driver's side and, with the key he held in his fist, turned the ignition. He pushed the accelerator to the floor, and the en-

gine roared uncertainly like a grouchy old dragon awakened from hibernation. It coughed several times, trying to clear its exhaust pipe.

Barry put the car in gear, and the dragon went back to sleep, snoring unevenly. Despite what the starting commotion had suggested, he was not a reckless driver; it was just that he knew that it usually took force to get the dragon motivated. Barry navigated the parking lot maze slowly and cautiously, like a grandmother in a school zone.

The Malibu was fifteen years old, and he took good care of it, and great pride in it. When his friends chided him about being too miserly to buy a new car, Barry would smile and say, "They don't make them like this baby any more." Then, as he caressed the slightly frayed vinyl roof, he would add, "By God, this is a car."

"Don't you find it even a little embarrassing to walk out in the middle of a movie like that?" Myrna asked, as her husband pulled up to the stop sign and eyed the approaching headlights.

"No." The syllable somehow escaped from between Barry's clenched teeth, and set loose an avalanche of words. "But, I am embarrassed—embarrassed for Hollywood, which obviously thinks that mutilation and dis-

memberment are entertainment. Embarrassed for my species because that entire audience didn't get up and walk out when I did. Embarrassed to sit next to an idiotic ghoul like Ed Willis, who—"

"Never mind, Barry. Forget I asked."

"Embarrassed to sit next to an idiotic ghoul like Ed Willis, who could be twice as smart as he is now and still be a halfwit." Barry found an opening, and pulled out into the flow of traffic.

Myrna had forgotten the futility of interrupting her husband once he got started. He would just back up and start over again. If he could only figure out how to put wheels under that tongue of his, she thought, he could enter it in the Indianapolis 500. But she really shouldn't criticize; her own jaws got plenty of exercise. She knew she was a gossip, and that it was impossible for her to keep a secret. She turned her attention back to her husband's tirade.

"Why, do you know what that pervert said to me during that disgusting scene when the killer was hiding in the closet, sharpening his meat cleaver, and the girl was getting ready to undress for bed? Do you know what he said to me? Do you?"

"Barry, turn on the lights!"

"No, he said—"

"I mean our lights—the car

lights. It's dark outside, you know."

Barry pulled the light switch, and for the next few miles, a fragile silence was the third passenger in the Malibu. Myrna endured its company for as long as she could, and then she shattered it.

"I thought you liked horror movies. You told me you did. The scarier the better, you said."

Barry snorted.

"Oh, come on now. You can't say that movie wasn't scary."

"Watch my lips," he invited. "It . . . was . . . not . . . scary."

"It was, too. You're just being difficult." Myrna crossed her arms defensively.

"It was not."

"Was too."

"Was not."

"Well, I'm glad we're keeping this discussion on an intellectual level. What are you going to do next? Stick your tongue out at me?" She glared out the window at the self-service gas stations and fast-food restaurants that seemed to pop up overnight around freeway entrances.

"You want to know what's scary?" Barry said. "I'll tell you what's scary."

"I thought you probably would."

"The fact that people are willing to pay good money to fill their heads with that kind of

garbage scares me. That they find watching human bodies being butchered in slow motion an enjoyable way to spend an evening scares me. No, it terrifies me, because it convinces me that the American people are doomed."

"A horror movie convinces you that our civilization is about to collapse. Now I remember why you failed philosophy in college."

"I'm serious," Barry said, as he guided the Malibu up the ramp and onto the freeway. "Those people tonight weren't scared. They weren't offended by all that bloodshed. They were, if anything, bored. They've seen it all before. It makes me wonder—if people are so used to watching graphic murder and savagery on the silver screen that it doesn't affect them any more, what would they do if they were confronted with something truly horrible in real life?"

"You mean like one of these speeches of yours?"

"Har-de-har. But you were right about one thing, Myrna. I did used to like horror movies—stuff like *Dracula*, *Psycho*, *The Phantom of the Opera*. By God, those were *movies*. They weren't all guts and gore flying everywhere like that thing to night. They left the real horror to your imagination. They had suspense, real suspense. The

only suspense in that movie tonight was in wondering which one of those sorry actors was going to be chopped up next. In slow motion, no less."

He thought for a few seconds, and then continued. "And the audience just sat there slurping it all up. Well, that explains a lot of things about why our society is going down the tubes. Like how people can read about the murder of their next door neighbor without batting an eye. That's not surprising. Hell, they could probably watch it being done, and still not bat an eye. Why? Because they've seen it a million times before—in the movies. That audience tonight would have probably fallen asleep watching Jack the Ripper at work."

"Sure, Barry."

"It's true. And the Willises are a perfect example. I believe you and I could hack each to pieces in the Willises' dining room without disturbing their digestion one bit." He switched to the left lane to pass a pickup truck.

"Barry, you're talking through your toupee."

"Oh, they might say how quaint, reminds me of the Texas Electric-Drill Massacre, or something, but they wouldn't have that horrible sick feeling that God intended man to have when something awful happens. They've become inured to

violence. That's the word, injured."

"Nutso, that's the word, nutso."

"Myrna dear, give your wit a rest; it's getting feeble in its old age. I know Ed and Dorothy are pillars of the community, or so they keep telling me, the insufferable jerks, but anybody who enjoys that kind of movie is only a step away from barbarism. Tell the truth, do you think it would faze the Willises at all if you were to murder me right before their eyes?"

"I don't know, but I'm almost tempted to find out."

"Yes, let's."

"Let's what?"

"Let's commit a murder in front of the Willises. You can kill me. What do you say?"

"I say you just passed our exit."

**D**uring his lunch hour the next day, Barry visited a magician's supply store in a part of town that he had always been careful to avoid before. There he purchased a collapsible kitchen knife and a quart bag of artificial blood. A magician's store was an appropriate place for him to buy his supplies, for the way he planned it, his "murder" was to be as much of an illusion as sawing a lady in half. However passionately Barry may have believed in his

theory, he was not willing to die to prove it. Besides, he had to be alive after he got "killed" so he could see the looks on the Willises' faces. After all, it was for them that he was going to all this trouble. It was to save them from barbarism. And to have a chuckle at the smug younger couple's expense, he admitted. The more he thought about that second idea, the more he liked it.

Barry went back to work, but found it impossible to concentrate on his responsibilities. He left early and rushed home to show Myrna his new toys.

"Oh, no," she said when he let her peek into the bag of tricks. "You don't really want to go through with it, do you?"

"Come on," he pleaded. "It'll be fun."

"Oh, sure, I'm supposed to murder my husband just to see what the neighbors will say about it. Sounds like a lot of fun, Barry."

"You're not going to murder anybody, my love, not with this knife. Watch." He knelt down in the classic hara-kiri position and took up the knife in both hands. He checked to make sure his wife was watching, then drove the blade into his stomach all the way up to the hilt.

"See?" He smiled.

For once, Myrna was at a loss for words.

"It doesn't hurt at all, but—" He pulled the knife out, and the blade sprang back so quickly and quietly it seemed as though it had always been there. He ran his thumb across the tip. "It's sharp enough to puncture that bag of blood which I'll have under my shirt when the Willises come over to play bridge Friday night. Can't you just see the looks on their faces when you stab me and blood spurts out?"

"I can just see the look on *your* face when the men with the butterfly nets come to take you away."

"Myrna, please."

"Why do you want to do this, Barry? Just tell me that."

"I already told you." Barry sighed. "I'm concerned about—"

"Whoa, save your breath, I heard all that last night. But it doesn't answer my question. I've heard you blame the collapse of civilization on everything from computers to longer recesses in kindergarten. You always get over it. That silly movie set you off and made you lose your temper. While you were fuming, you thought up this crazy idea. But you're not angry any more. Look at you, you're positively gleeful. Why do you still want to go through with your crazy idea?"

Barry carefully set the knife down, and stood up. He waited a few painful seconds while

feeling returned to his legs. Sitting on the floor, he mused, was only for young people and the Japanese, and he was neither.

"Do you want a drink?" he asked. "I'm buying."

"I want an answer."

Barry's face was blank, as though he were debating something within himself, as he trudged to the kitchen. He returned with a glass of clear fluid and three ice cubes. He walked over the spot on the floor where he had just committed "suicide," and settled in his favorite chair, the green recliner. He always felt more secure there. Myrna sat on the sofa across from him, waiting. It was obvious he was going to have to open up to her to get her cooperation, and opening up was not something that came easily to him.

He downed the drink in three quick gulps before he spoke.

"Myrna, when was the last time we beat the Willises at bridge? Or tennis? Or anything for that matter?"

"I don't know. Lots of times. What difference does it make, anyway?"

"It doesn't seem like we've ever beaten them at anything. They're always unbearably pompous and smug even when they lose, so it's hard to tell. But that wouldn't bother me if it weren't for all the other things." Barry picked up the empty glass,



and gazed into its depths as though it were a crystal ball. "Ed's promotion to office manager even though I've got eleven year's seniority on him. The way Dorothy acts so superior and condescending toward you. The Yard of the Month sign that stays in their yard month after month." Barry set the glass down on the end table beside him. "The fact that Ed Willis is not going bald, and I am."

Myrna buried a smile.

"Just once I want to get the better of them. I want to rub their noses in it and take them down a few pegs. And the best way I know to do that is to set them up to look like prize chumps, and then laugh at them. Nobody can be smug when they're being laughed at. I want to laugh at them, laugh until they don't intimidate me any more. Maybe I can laugh off some of this resentment they've built up in me, and we can all be friends again."

"Now that makes a little bit more sense—not much, but a little."

"Then you'll do it?"

"Yes. I think it's a dirty trick, and I know there must be a better way for you to get over those feelings of resentment, but because I can't think of one, we'll do it your way. Lord knows, if this is the worst thing you come up with during your male

menopause, I should count my blessings."

Barry laughed. "It'll be fun. You'll see. Nobody's going to get hurt, and you'll get a chance to brush up on your acting a little. You remember how much you enjoyed drama class when we were in college."

"I also remember what a rotten actress I was."

"You'll do great. I know you will."

And so Barry and Myrna Jordan began rehearsing the act of murder.

It was decided that sometime during the bridge game Barry would start an argument. They did not plan what specifically the argument was to be about, for they both recognized that Barry was something of an expert at making scenes. He would just ad lib it. Myrna would follow his lead; angry words would lead to more angry words, and before the Willises had time to realize just what was going on, Myrna would step through the dining room into the adjoining kitchen, and get the knife. (All the real knives had been removed from the drawer and placed in the dishwasher to prevent any possibility of an accident.) She would then return to the living room, and seemingly stab her husband to death. The Willises would (Barry hoped) scream,

and maybe even go into some mild form of shock. Then, when Barry was sure that they had learned their lesson, he would hop up, and they'd all have a good laugh. Of course, Barry's laugh would be the best, but they'd all laugh.

At least, that's the way it was planned.

All week long Barry was like a kid counting the hours until Christmas morning. Finally Friday arrived, and with it, Ed and Dorothy Willis. Barry welcomed their pomposity tonight. His congratulations were hearty as Ed bragged about the new boat he'd just bought. He smiled when Dorothy said that the men from the Beautiful Living section in the Sunday newspaper were coming to photograph her house. It was all just grist for the mill; it would make his revenge all the sweeter.

The game began, and almost immediately the bag of blood concealed beneath Barry's shirt began to itch. It took all his self-restraint to keep from scratching it. That would never do, he told himself. The bag was very fragile, and he could just imagine how it would look if he were to scratch his chest and a quart of blood came pouring out. They would probably laugh at him, and he did not think he would be able to stand that.

That wasn't the only thing that went wrong, either. He

and Myrna had assumed that the argument would arise naturally out of the bridge game, the bridge table being one of the easiest places in the world to start an argument, especially if your partner played as erratically as Myrna did. On this Friday evening, however, Barry and Myrna got all the cards, and all the luck. Myrna played brilliantly. Barry found himself in the position of being unable to lose no matter how hard he tried. And he did try. That plus the fact that his chest itched like a troop of army ants was bivouacked there made him extremely restless and frustrated. He fidgeted around, and was so self-conscious he never noticed that Ed and Dorothy appeared just as nervous as he did.

Finally, he saw his chance and jumped at it. Myrna got the contract with an obviously overconfident bid of five no-trump. Barry threw down his cards and cursed.

"What are you trying to do, you idiot—throw the game?" he screamed. "We couldn't make five no-trump even if you could play cards worth a damn!"

Myrna's mouth hung open, but no words came out. Barry prayed she hadn't developed stage fright. He prompted her some more. "We had the game wrapped up in spite of your wretched playing, and now you've blown it."

"Barry, please, you're making a scene."

"I know exactly what I'm doing, and I know what you're trying to do also, you . . . you . . ." Barry had used all the curse words he knew in his initial outburst, and was fumbling around for some fresh ones.

"Don't you dare call me any more names, Barrence Jordan."

That was a nice touch, Barry thought, calling him by his full name like that. That's just what she'd do if she were really angry.

"What are you going to do about it?" he challenged.

"I'll show you what I'm going to do about it, you knave." Myrna sprang out of her chair and dashed to the kitchen. Barry heard the knife drawer yanked open.

"Knave?" He had forgotten that Myrna's favorite kind of acting was melodrama. He hoped the Willises were too upset to notice her overacting. It was the last thought he had before his wife plunged a knife into his chest.

"That's what I'm going to do about it," Myrna said as her husband slid out of his chair and hit the floor with a house-rocking thud. Blood poured out of his chest and onto the plastic mat he and Myrna had strategically placed over the carpet.

For several seconds there was

no sound but the plaintive harmonizing of a few crickets which had not yet left the suburbs.

"Excellent technique," Ed Willis said, lighting another cigarette. "For an amateur, that is. You need to work on your followthrough, Myrna. It was just a tad weak."

"My husband is too stingy with his praise, Myrna dear," said Dorothy. "I thought your wrist movement as you twisted the blade in was nothing short of delicious. You've been holding out on us, haven't you? Surely this wasn't your first murder."

"At any rate," Ed added, "it's a good thing Barry was dummy, else we'd have to stop the game. Pass the peanuts, Dorothy love."

All three broke out in conspiratorial giggles.

"You can get up any time now, Barry," said Ed. "I'm afraid Myrna let the cat out of the bag yesterday, and we decided to turn the tables a little."

The body on the floor did not move.

"Come on, Barry. Be a good sport. The joke's on you this time."

Still Barry did not move. Blood trickled off the mat and onto the rug. The Willises stood up, sensing something wrong.

"Barry?" Myrna whispered.

Slowly, as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, Barry got to his feet.

Without looking at his wife or his neighbors, he walked out of the room toward the kitchen.

The three people in the living room shrugged their shoulders at each other in answer to the unspoken question: what is going on here?

The dishwasher opened.

Ed and Dorothy sat back down to await Barry's return. They did not have to wait long.

A madman with Barry's face came from the kitchen. He kicked the card table over, and laughed maniacally. There was a blood-red stain on his shirt, and a carving knife in his right hand.

"You're all dead now!" he shrieked. "I'll kill you for spoiling my joke. By God, I *will* have the last laugh." The carving knife was unquestionably real. Ed and Dorothy had seen him use it many times.

Barry lunged at Ed with the knife. Dorothy screamed. Nobody heard it, not even Dorothy. It was drowned out by Ed's louder and higher-pitched scream. They both dashed for the front door, Barry right behind them slicing the air and growling insanely. The Willises hit the front door at the exact same second in the manner of Laurel and Hardy, but fear for their lives prevented them from getting stuck in the jamb, as those two comedians had done. One of them was still scream-

ing as they disappeared down the road. Neither of them took the time to turn around, but if they had they would have seen that Barry was no longer behind them. He had only gone as far as the front steps. He was standing there doubled up with laughter. The knife slipped from his fingers, and he stood there laughing as he had never laughed before.

He was still laughing, silently, though, since he was now hoarse, as he walked back into the house.

"I showed them a thing or two, didn't I, Myrna? Did you see the looks on their faces?"

No answer.

"Myrna?"

Not a sound. Even the crickets were silent, waiting.

Barry felt a chill breeze, and then he saw the back door—the sliding glass door. It was open now, and it definitely had not been earlier. The screen door lay twisted at the bottom of the back steps, dying from a huge gash in its midsection.

"Myrna?" Barry called out to the darkness.

"Go get a ladder. Quick, I'm freezing." Myrna's voice seemed to emanate from somewhere near the full moon.

"Where are you?"

"Up here. In this stupid tree. Go get a ladder."

Barry laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Andre Kertesz

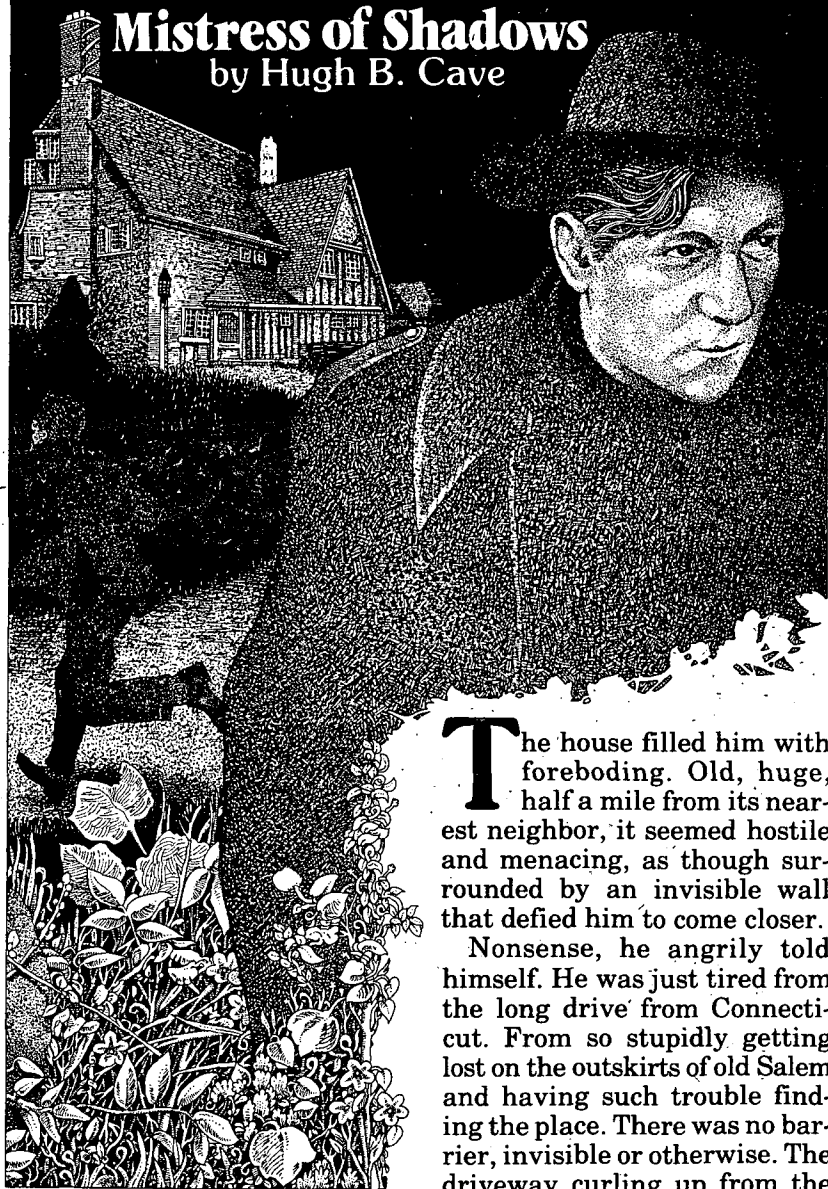
Some secrets may be not wholly hidden after all. . . . We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the October Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

# Mistress of Shadows

by Hugh B. Cave



**T**he house filled him with foreboding. Old, huge, half a mile from its nearest neighbor, it seemed hostile and menacing, as though surrounded by an invisible wall that defied him to come closer.

Nonsense, he angrily told himself. He was just tired from the long drive from Connecticut. From so stupidly getting lost on the outskirts of old Salem and having such trouble finding the place. There was no barrier, invisible or otherwise. The driveway curling up from the

Illustration by Kurt Wallace



two-lane blacktop was even inviting. At least, it appealed to the architect in him.

*All right. Witches were hanged hereabouts, three hundred years ago. Our people came from this part of New England. I inherited this feeling, probably.*

Stopping his car short of the once-handsome Victorian piazza that ran along the front, he sat for a moment studying the house and what he could see of a weathered old barn behind it.

He didn't know much about his sister's visit, actually. Aware of his indifference to her passion for genealogy, she had been reluctant to discuss her activities with him.

Some woman living in this house had replied to a query of hers in a publication specializing in family pedigrees. There'd been an exchange of letters, a phone call, then Prudence had said quite casually, "I'll be going to Salem on Tuesday."

"The Salem? Massachusetts?"

"I'll be back Wednesday."

"You're onto something new?"

"I won't bore you."

"I won't bore you" was a kind of code phrase this talented sister of his frequently used to shut him out of her world. She didn't encourage many people to enter that world. But she *was* his sister and today was Friday, and she had not phoned to ex-

plain her failure to return as planned. It was out of character, for her not to phone.

He glanced at his watch—only half an hour more of daylight this cool October evening—then got out of his car and climbed the worn, wooden piazza steps. About two hundred years old, he estimated, letting his practiced gaze travel over the house as he pulled the porcelain bell knob. Shamefully neglected.

The wide front door swung open, and he found himself face to face with a small, slender man of about forty who seemed as neglected as the house itself.

"Yes?"

"Good evening. My name is Mark Reeves and I'm looking for my sister. She told me she was coming here."

There was a drabness about the man that infected even his voice. "Here? Today?"

"Tuesday. She came here to see a Mrs. Sarah Woodlin."

"My mother-in-law." The man summoned enough energy to frown. "Owns this place. Victor Mayne's my name. Nobody called here Tuesday that I know of."

Mark felt a return of his unease. "You haven't seen a young blonde woman, very attractive, driving a new blue station wagon?"

Victor Mayne silently wagged his head.



"Could I—do you suppose I could have a word with Mrs. Woodlin? They corresponded, you see. There was at least one phone call to arrange a meeting. Perhaps she will know—"

"Talk to 'er if you like. She's out back, most likely. Come on in. I'll call 'er."

Mark followed him into a large living room filled with old furniture. Not invited to sit, he stood there feeling out of place while his host walked listlessly into a room beyond and called out, "Sarah! Hey, Sarah! Somebody here wants to see you."

Presently a woman's voice answered querulously, "Who is it?"

"Feller named Reeves. Says you know his sister." Mayne returned to the room where Mark waited. "She'll come. Sit down, why don't you?"

Mark sat down. After a moment of apparent indecision, Mayne followed suit, all but losing his tenuous identity in the grayness of the chair he sank into. "Your sister said she was comin' here Tuesday?"

"Yes. She believes we have ancestors who lived in Salem. She put a query in a magazine, and your mother-in-law answered it."

"That's exactly what happened," said a thin voice from the doorway, and Mark turned to find himself staring at two

women. The one who had spoken was a diminutive creature probably in her eighties, wearing a floor-length garment of purple velvet that had once been an evening gown. A narrow band of the same material encircled her wisp of a neck and was tied in a bow at her throat.

The other woman was taller, younger, but much less colorful.

"You're Mr. Reeves, and looking for Prudence Reeves?" The old lady briskly advanced, offering a hand so like the hand of a doll that Mark was almost afraid to touch it, lest it break off at its tiny wrist. "Yes? Well, she didn't keep her appointment with me. After I went to all the trouble of answering her letter in the magazine, and she telephoned me and all, she didn't come. I'm very much annoyed with her." She scowled ferociously. "This is my daughter Daphne, my youngest. The other one, Leila, isn't here just now. Mr. Reeves, I'd like to know why your sister didn't come after saying she would."

"I wish I knew."

He guessed the daughter, Daphne, was Victor Mayne's wife. If two persons could look alike from being married to each other, then she certainly was.

"Prudence left home early Tuesday morning to come here,"

Mark said, and glanced at his watch. "It shouldn't have taken her any longer to drive up than it took me today; she's a no-nonsense driver. She was to have returned Wednesday. But I haven't seen or heard from her."

"The two of you live together?" Sarah Woodlin asked.

"We share the family homestead. There's only the two of us left."

"Well, she never came here." The old gown shimmered like a purple waterfall as Sarah Woodlin defiantly drew herself straighter.

"Just what did she want from you, Mrs. Woodlin?"

"To talk about your family. My people helped settle this part of Massachusetts, and she thought her ancestors were here in those days, too. And they were. When you see her, you can tell her so. I spent days tracing the name Reeves back through—"

"Now, Ma," Daphne said.

"Well, I did!"

"Mr. Reeves don't want to hear about your ancestors, Sarah," Victor Mayne said. "He just wants to know where his sister is."

"Well, all I can tell you, again, is that she never came here." The old lady tossed her head. "She must have changed her mind. Or had an accident on the way."

Mark found himself not liking the way the three of them were eyeing him now. "Well . . . thanks."

"When you find her," Sarah said, "tell her she can still come see me if she's a mind to."

"I will."

"And you. I'd be pleased to talk to you. In the old days the Reeveses and my family were real close. Yes, real close."

Nodding, Mark turned to find that Victor Mayne was waiting to show him out. At the front door, with a shrug, the colorless man said, "Sorry, mister."

It was dark outside as Mark walked across the piazza to the steps. There had been lights on in the house, but evidently Mayne had no intention of putting on the verandah light to help him to his car. The front door closed behind him with an emphatic thud of dismissal, and he groped his way down to the driveway.

But as he reached the bottom, a voice from a mass of dark forsythia bushes to his left suddenly whispered, "Wait!"

He halted. The other sister? It was a woman, anyway.

"Turn left at the foot of the drive," the voice instructed in a rush of whispered words. "Stop down the road where they won't see you. I'll be along in a few minutes."

"All right." He got into his

car. Turning as directed pointed him back toward Salem, which was the way he would have gone in any case.

The road was all curves. After rounding the first, he pulled over to the side.

In about five minutes she came, simply opening the car door and sliding onto the seat beside him. Not the other sister, he saw at once. Not nearly old enough. Her hair was dark and short. Were the dark blouse and even darker slacks deliberate, so as to lessen the chance of her being seen by the people at the house?

"I'm Kim Barton," she said. "I have a room back there."

He frankly stared at her, though in the dim light from the dash it was scarcely a searching look. "A room?"

"I rent one. It's directly above the one you were talking in, and I heard most of what you said. I'm a schoolteacher. Look, Mr.—Reeves, is it?"

"Mark Reeves."

"They're not telling the truth. There *was* a car at the house Tuesday evening."

He caught his breath. "A blue station wagon?"

"A station wagon. I'm not sure of the color. I was in my room when it arrived, and I went to the window and looked down because we don't have many callers in the evening. I

didn't see who got out of it. By the time I reached the window, the person was on the verandah. I didn't hear any talk, either; they must have talked in the other living room—the house has two. But the car was there at least three hours. I was in bed, after eleven, when I heard it leave."

"Why do you suppose they're lying?"

"I have no idea."

"What kind of people are they, Miss Barton?"

"Well, I don't know. This is my second year of teaching in this town, and I've had a room there since I started, but I have to say I just don't know."

"The old lady must be dotty. That purple gown—"

"She's eighty-three years old. But the house belongs to her, and when she cracks the whip, the others jump."

"What about Mayne? What does he do?"

"He was a bus driver. A heart attack at the wheel one day caused him to have a terrible accident, and he hasn't driven since. Not even a car."

"Is the other daughter married?"

"Her husband walked out on her, and the old lady never lets her forget it." Kim Barton opened her door. "I have to get back."

"Do they check on you?"

"I don't suppose it's that, but I never know when one of them will knock on my door. I teach history, and the old lady would go on about Salem history for hours if I'd let her. The daughters—well, I think they sneak up to my room to get away from her."

"It sounds gruesome."

She laughed as she slid from the seat, and again Mark noticed how attractive she was. Or, rather, how relaxed and natural she was. "I hope you find your sister," she said.

"Thanks for trying to help me."

"What will you do?"

"I'll have to think about it."

She looked at him, nodded, and was gone.

**H**e was a man who arrived at decisions quickly, and by the time he had reached the village he knew what he would do. It was a small place, just a traffic light and a cluster of stores at a widening of the blacktop. He found a drugstore with a phone booth.

When a long-distance call to his Connecticut home elicited no answer, he called his secretary's home. "Ethel? Mark. Look, I'm in Massachusetts—that town Prue went to. She isn't here. Have you heard from her?"

Ethel Anderson was a woman whose voice invariably disclosed her feelings. He could all but see the frown-lines in her always expressive face as she said, "Heard from her? No, Mark. Is something wrong?"

"I'm not sure. I'm staying, of course, until I find out. Will you be at home this evening?"

"Yes."

"I'll call you later, then, when I've found a place to stop. Meanwhile, give my house a ring every so often, will you? She just might turn up."

Leaving the booth, he stepped to the counter and asked the gray-haired man behind it if there was a motel nearby.

"There's one. Place called Stoughton's. Which way you headed?"

"Salem."

"Just keep goin' four blocks, then."

"And do you have a police station?"

"Right across the road from the motel."

Stoughton's was a red brick rectangle with numbered white doors. The parking strip was empty. Opening a door marked OFFICE, Mark stepped under a tinkling bell to an unattended desk and waited there until an inner door opened and a woman appeared.

"Hello," she said indifferently. "Can I help you?"

"I'd like a room for the night."

Producing a key and a register, she watched him sign his name, then looked at him with more interest. "Mark Reeves? We had a Prudence Reeves here just the other day." Her fingers flipped a page. "Tuesday. But she never used her room."

He frowned at the signature. It was his sister's, without question. As he fixed his gaze on the face of the woman before him, he was chilled again by the foreboding he had felt at the old Woodlin house. "You say she didn't use her room?"

"She never came back that night."

"What time Tuesday did she check in?"

"Well, my husband had just sat down to supper, so it was about six. I checked her in and she looked at the room and said all right, she'd be back later. Paid for it, too. But she never showed up." The woman cocked her head like an outsized bird sensing a juicy worm of scandal. "She your wife?"

"My sister. Did she leave anything in her room?"

"Nope. Nothin'."

"Did she ask any directions?"

"Well, now, she asked me how to get to Mill Brook Road."

"I see." What Mark saw was the old house whose occupants wanted him to believe Prue had never called on them.

He thanked the woman for her information and went to the room she had assigned him. When he had carried in his overnight case, he locked the door behind him and went across the road to an old white house that bore a sign reading POLICE over its colonial doorway. He was beginning to be a little hungry, too. His only food all day had been a burger and coffee at a drive-in, about eleven o'clock.

A card thumbtacked to the door instructed callers to "knock and walk in." Doing so, he found himself at the foot of a carpeted staircase. To his right an open door revealed what had been a colonial living room but was now something else.

A diminutive, white-haired woman in her late forties or early fifties, wearing a khaki blouse and skirt, sat there, working at a huge walnut desk. The room was full of a John Philip Sousa march booming in stereo from the twin speakers of a tape player.

Mark was halfway to the desk before the woman looked up from something she was writing. She frowned at him. Frowning was probably easy for that stern face. "Yes?"

"Good evening. This is the police station?"

"I'm chief here. Name's Kate Kendall. What can I do for

you?" Swinging briskly on her swivel chair, she shut off the tape.

Without the booming music, the room seemed vast and empty, and the loudness of Mark's voice startled him as he began his story.

"Well, I can understand Sarah Woodlin acting queer," Kate Kendall said when he finished. "She is queer. I don't see why the daughter and her husband would lie to you, but if Kim Barton said she saw a station wagon there, she saw it. I know her. She's a fine young woman." Kendall got to her feet. "It won't do any harm for us to go back and talk to those people, I guess. Is your car handy?"

"Across the road."

"I'll lock up while you go for it."

She was really not a bad sort, Mark decided as they drove to Mill Brook Road. Beneath the brusqueness, the village's only police officer appeared to be a normal, curious, even friendly woman. Once she stopped being wary of him, she was even talkative.

"So your sister's one of those who get all worked up about their ancestors, is she?" Kate said. "Well, it's easy to see why she'd want to call on Sarah Woodlin. Sarah's another one."

"So Miss Barton told me."

"Now, as I said before, there's

a nice girl. Came here from out of town to teach in the district high school, and we're all just crazy about her. By the way, I don't think we ought to tell those people Kim talked to you."

"I was going to suggest the same thing."

"We'll just say Alice Stoughton, at the motel, gave your sister directions and—well, you leave it to me."

Approaching the house, Mark again felt it was somehow sinister. The floor-length windows were aglow with light now, as were two smaller windows upstairs, probably in Kim Barton's room. When Kate Kendall gave the doorbell a yank, the piazza fixture winked on.

Again it was the nondescript Victor Mayne who opened the door.

"Hello, Mr. Mayne," Kate said. "Tell Sarah I'd like a word with her, if you will."

The gray man's gaze shifted to Mark for a second, but then he shrugged. "Okay. Come on in."

Again Mark found himself in the drably furnished living room.

Sarah, still gowned in purple and wearing the purple bow at her throat, was there with Mayne's wife, Daphne, and another woman who appeared to be the other daughter. Several years older than Daphne, she

had the same plain face and mousy hair.

The three were watching television, but Sarah got up to turn the set off and said in mock surprise, "Well, bless my soul. Good evening, Kate. And you again, Mr. Reeves? Sit down, both of you."

Seated, Kate said crisply, "We seem to be having a problem, Sarah."

"We? Or the gentleman here who can't find his sister?"

"We, Sarah. You. Because his sister came here."

"But I've already told him she didn't."

"I know what you've told him. But Miss Reeves was directed here by Alice Stoughton at the motel."

"Well, I can't help that. She just never turned up."

"Her car was seen here."

"By whom?" Sarah demanded, bristling.

"Never mind that. Just take my word for it, the car was seen here. A blue station wagon."

"Not blue," Sarah snapped. "Green."

"What?"

"The car that was here Tuesday evening was green, Kate. And it wasn't anything Mr. Reeves's sister would be driving; it was Danny Elder's old wagon. Whoever you talked to has pretty poor eyesight, if you ask me."

Kate Kendall seemed taken aback, but quickly recovered. "All right, Sarah. Is Kim Barton here?"

"Why?"

"I'll ask you to call her."

"If you like." Sarah shrugged. "Go on, Leila."

The cheerless living room was silent as the daughter whose husband had deserted her walked like a zombie into the hall.

As she climbed the staircase, Mark felt a touch of panic. Surely Kate Kendall was not going to reverse herself and let these people know their boarder had accused them of lying!

When Leila reappeared, followed by Kim Barton, Mark held his breath. Seeing the girl's face lose color as she became aware of his presence, he suddenly disliked Kate Kendall intensely.

But Kate spoke quietly before anyone else could voice a word. "Kim, I want to ask a question or two, if you don't mind. But first let me introduce Mr. Mark Reeves, from Connecticut. Mr. Reeves, this is Miss Kimberly Barton, who boards here."

As Mark accepted Kim's hand, her gaze touched his to flash a message of relief.

"Were you here Tuesday evening, Kim?" Kate asked.

"Yes, I was."



"We want to know if you saw a car here."

"Why, yes, I did."

"What kind of car? What color?"

"It was a station wagon—fairly new, I think. I'm not sure of the color. Blue, perhaps, or black."

"It was Danny Elder's old *green* station wagon," Sarah Woodlin snapped, "and you've certainly seen it before!"

"Danny Elder's car? Really, Sarah—"

"Go *ask* him!" Furious now, Sarah swung on Kate. "This is nonsense, when all you have to do is go to Danny's house and ask him! He was over here Tuesday evening to fix a leaky pipe under the kitchen sink. It took him nearly two hours, and his wagon was out front the whole time."

Again Kate Kendall seemed disconcerted. "Well . . . all right. If you say so, Sarah."

"I say so!"

Kate shifted her gaze to Kim Barton. "I suppose you *could* have been mistaken, Kim." Shaking her head, she turned to Mark. "We've no reason to take up any more time here, it seems."

Victor Mayne showed them out, in a silence that endured until Mark's car was descending the driveway. "Turn right," Kate said then.

"We're going to call on this Danny Elder?"

"Might as well, though I don't suppose Sarah was lying. Not about that part of it, anyway. Take your first left."

Their destination, less than a mile from the Woodlin place, was a shabby house in a cluttered clearing. Without Kate's guidance he would have missed it even if given directions, for it was hidden from the road by trees. In the yard stood the old green station wagon Sarah had talked about.

Danny lived here, Kate said, with his aged grandmother and a "no-good" father. "Sound your horn," she added. "Never know if Clay Elder's got his brute of a dog tied up."

A dog did bark somewhere, then stopped and began growling. It was an ugly sound. A voice tersely ordered the animal to "shut up" and presently a youth of about seventeen appeared. His long blond hair bounced on his shoulders as he advanced. Bare and muscular above the belt, he wore only dirty bluejeans and dirtier sneakers. "Oh, hi, Miz Kendall. You lookin' for Pa?"

"No, for you. I've had a complaint about you, Danny." Kate scowled at him. "Where were you Tuesday evening?"

His pale eyes seemed to darken. "Tuesday? Nowhere.

'Cept Miz Woodlin's, that is. I was there for a time."

"Doing what?"

"Fixin' her sink."

"You were over there fixing a sink in the *evening*?"

"Well, I was workin' on my car all that afternoon."

For a moment Kate continued to stare. Then she said with a sigh, "All right, Danny," and the conversation was over.

"Dead end?" Mark said as he drove back out to the road. "Why did he ask if you wanted his father?"

"No special reason, I guess. Clay Elder has a temper and gets into trouble a lot. Tell me about your sister, Mr. Reeves. She younger than you, or older?"

"Two years older. Thirty-one."

"An artist, I believe you said. Attractive?"

"Very."

"So what will you do about finding her now?"

"I don't know, Miss Kendall."

"Just call me Kate. I don't exactly know what to do, either, but it would seem her car disappeared between the motel and the Woodlin house. Unless, of course, she went somewhere else. I'll get on the phone and find out if her car was in an accident. You'll be at Stoughton's tonight?"

Mark nodded.

"I'll call you when I find out something."

There was a phone in Mark's motel room. He called his secretary.

"No, Mark," Ethel Anderson said. "I've called your house every half hour since we talked before, and no one answers." He could just see her shaking her head in distress—she cared about people's problems. She was fond of Prue, too.

Having told Ethel where he was staying, he drove down the road to a diner. Then on his return he threw himself on the bed and lay there gazing at the ceiling, reviewing in his mind what had happened.

There was something evil about the Woodlin house. Why couldn't he put his finger on it?

**K**ate Kendall did not call. In the morning, after going to the diner for a breakfast he didn't want but felt he ought to eat, Mark returned to the motel to continue waiting. Just as he was becoming restless enough to invade the police station again, someone knocked on his door.

It was the proprietor's wife, to deliver an envelope that had "Mr. Reeves" written on it in a neat, feminine script.

Mark tore it open and unfolded the sheet of paper it contained. The writing was the same. "Dear Mr. Reeves, I believe I have located your sister's

car, but my own is giving me trouble and I must send this to you by messenger. If you will drive out Worden Road to the old stone quarry, you will find me there. Yours, Kim Barton."

He felt a thrill of excitement at knowing Kim Barton was still trying to help him. At the same time, a warning bell rang in his subconscious. "Who delivered this, Mrs. Stoughton?"

"A boy on a bike. He rode right off again."

"Did you know him?"

"Uh-uh. I've no idea who he was."

"Well . . . can you tell me how to get to Worden Road, please?"

"Let's see, now. Best way for you, I guess, would be to drive out Mill Brook Road to Creston, and turn right. Worden crosses Creston after about a mile."

"I'm to go to an old quarry on Worden."

She nodded. "Used to swim there when we were kids. Turn left on Worden and look for a side road. Just a pair of ruts leading left into the woods. Drive in a little way and there you are."

Mark hurried to his car. Should he tell the police chief where he was going? He ought to. The door marked "knock and walk in" was locked, though. Kate Kendall was probably out pursuing some idea of her own.

As he passed the old Woodlin

house, something about it filled him with revulsion. Somewhere within those gloomy rooms, he was convinced, lay the secret of Prue's disappearance. Whatever had happened to her had at least begun to happen there.

He could have sworn the house furtively watched him as he drove by, and even knew where he was going. The feeling still haunted him when he reached his destination.

A pair of ruts on the left? He found them and drove in at a crawl, searching for proof that Kim's car had preceded him. But the ground was covered by rotted leaves. There were no tire prints.

Then as the woods closed in solidly behind him, seeming to cut off his retreat, he came to a stretch of bare ground that did contain the marks of tires, and he stopped.

New tires had made these prints. Expensive new radials. Prue had bought a set of such tires less than a month ago.

So Kim Barton *had* found Prue's car. At least, the car had been here. But something puzzled him as he peered through the windshield at the patch of bare ground. If Kim had driven in here, *her* car should have left tire prints, too. In fact, these earlier prints ought to be all but obliterated.

He went forward on foot to examine the marks more closely. There was no sign that any machine other than Prue's had been here. Returning to his car, he shut off the engine. The stillness of the place was relieved only by a sound of leaves faintly rustling in a barely perceptible breeze. Apprehensive now, he walked slowly on down the road to reconnoiter.

The quarry was farther in than the Stoughton woman had led him to believe. Or, at least, than he had anticipated. His car was out of sight behind him when he caught his first glimpse of dark water glimmering among the trees ahead. He stopped again.

The place appeared to be an open pit, roughly circular, about sixty yards across. Nothing more—just an excavation nearly full of water. The old road on which he stood must have been used for hauling out the stone.

Suddenly he took in a sharp breath. In a clump of alders and brush near the quarry's edge, something other than water shone faintly in the forest's dim light. Something blue.

He was staring at Prue's station wagon.

With mixed emotions he strode forward. Someone had driven the car in here to hide it, apparently. But who? Not Prue, surely. She would have

had no reason to come here at all.

Suddenly something flashed past his cheek. Not an insect but something metallic, shiny, that split the air with a whistling sound and then ripped through a leafy branch behind him. He dropped to the ground.

As he rolled out of the road, a second missile flashed above him, then a third. Both would surely have struck him had he stayed on his feet. Striving to make no sound, he crawled into the underbrush ten, fifteen feet before stopping again. Then he lay flat, listening.

There was no sound except a faint whisper of wind and the heavy thudding of his own heart.

Had someone shot at him? He thought so but could not be sure. If the missiles had been bullets, the weapon firing them must have been equipped with a silencing device. But was it possible to eliminate all sound with a silencer? He did not know.

But someone had certainly tried to hit him—kill him, probably—with a weapon of some sort. Someone, it seemed, had been using Prue's car as bait.

Knowing the risk he took, he began crawling again. The distance back to his car was not great, if he could avoid a blunder. But the slightest sound, even a twig snapping under

him, would betray his whereabouts in this eerie stillness. Sweat ran salty over his tight-pressed lips as he crawled.

Was that a footstep off to his right, where the road was? He held his breath, listening. The sound was not repeated, but he was moving away from the road, he saw by raising his head slightly. That was bad. He must get to his car by the shortest route. The farther he had to crawl, the more prolonged the peril.

When at last he saw the car, he was twenty yards from it and had to pause again to let his heart stop racing. Had he left the key in the ignition? Yes. Good. That would eliminate fumbling. Of course, he would not be able to turn the machine around. There wasn't room enough. He would have to drive it out in reverse.

He took in a steady breath and advanced again. Under his left knee a bit of dry wood cracked. Somewhere, not too close, a man's voice barked, "There! Over there!"

Mark leaped to his feet and ran.

As he ran he heard the whine of missiles again, and louder sounds as the bullets or whatever they were ripped through leaves and branches close to his face. Just as he reached the car, something nicked his outflung

arm, sending a shock wave to his fingertips. But he was able to claw the door open with that same hand. He could still dive in behind the wheel and turn the key.

The engine roared to life. Twisting on the seat, peering through the rear window, he sent the machine lurching backward. A pursuing missile struck the radiator grille. Another crashed into the windshield.

But despite its wild swerving, the car ate up the ruts. One final swerve at the main road and, twisting himself around again to face forward, he drove off. How close he had come to being killed or caught was written in the windshield, where the glass resembled a spider-web.

He drove a mile and got out to inspect the car and himself. The windshield and radiator grille puzzled him. Bullets would have done more damage, he felt. As for his arm, the missile must have just grazed it. There was a painful swelling between wrist and elbow, but he could find no break in the skin.

Lucky, he thought. That was meant to be an ambush.

**H**e heard march music again as he opened Kate Kendall's door. After turning off the tape

player, the police chief folded her arms and glowered at him.

"You look like death warmed over. What's going on?"

After telling her, he handed her the note from Kim.

Kate unlocked a drawer of her desk and took out a holstered revolver. "Come!" As she marched to the door he could almost hear the band playing.

In the yard she examined his car. "You're right: this wasn't done by bullets. I'd say somebody was throwing stones."

"I don't think they were stones. They were shiny."

"H'm." She turned to her own car, a black sedan with the word POLICE in white on its sides. "I'll drive this time."

After a while she said, "How do you suppose your sister's car got there, Mr. Reeves?"

"I have no idea."

"Seems an unlikely place for a stranger to go."

"I agree."

"Strange." Turning onto the quarry road, Kate leaned over the wheel, peering ahead. "Now just where did you leave your car and go forward on foot?"

He showed her. Stopping short of the spot, she opened her door and got out. Mark followed as she went slowly along the road with her gaze on the ground.

Where his car had stood, she stooped to pick up something. "Is this what was fired at you?"

It was a steel ball about the size of a common marble: a ball bearing of some kind, Mark guessed. "It could be, I suppose."

She dropped the object into a pocket of her khaki shirt.

"They didn't have guns, then, did they?" Mark said. "No gun could have fired that."

"No gun that I know anything about. Why do you say 'they'?"

"As I told you, I heard a man call out, 'Over there!' He must have been calling to someone."

"You did say that. And you didn't recognize the voice?"

He shook his head.

"Well"—she was marching again—"let's have a look at the car."

But when they came in sight of the quarry, the only glitter in the forest's faint light was that of the water. No station wagon was there in the alder clump.

"It was here?" Kate said.

He pointed to tire marks at his feet. They were indistinct because the earth at that spot consisted mostly of leaf mold, but it was evident a vehicle had stood there. Kate looked toward the pit.

The car had been parked only a few yards from the edge. There were no other tire marks—perhaps the ground could not retain any—but within

a foot of the quarry a small sapling had been broken off. Kate marched to the pit's rim.

Gazing down into that dark, shining water, Mark felt himself shudder. It looked deep and inhospitable. He wondered how even a woman as seemingly insensitive as Alice Stoughton, at the motel, could ever have come here to swim. After a moment Kate said, "I'll have to get help, of course. I can't go diving down there myself."

"You think the car is in there?"

"We have to find out."

He shuddered again, wondering what kind of devilish business his sister had got mixed up in. It was a relief when Kate said gruffly, "Well, let's go," and he was able to turn away from that unwholesome-looking place.

On the way back she turned up the Woodlins' driveway, but instead of getting out of the car, simply blew the horn until the front door opened. Leila, the older daughter, was the one who opened it.

"Tell Kim Barton I'd like a word with her, please."

"Can't you come in?"

"Haven't time."

When Kim appeared, Kate handed her the note. "Did you write this, girl?"

Kim frowned at it in obvious bewilderment. "No, I didn't.

What in the world—"

"Can't stop to explain now. You want to ask questions, you'll have to come with us."

Kim jumped into the car, and Kate sent it squealing down the driveway. The front door of the house was open behind them, Mark saw while recovering his balance. On the piazza, staring, stood old Sarah Woodlin, her two daughters, and the gray man, Victor Mayne.

Why did they make him think of vultures?

**K**ate Kendall must have been a demon when demanding action from others. Mark and Kim were not present when she phoned for assistance in exploring the quarry; she had dropped them off at the motel, promising to call when she had anything to report. But Mark was still answering Kim's questions about his work as an architect and his life in Connecticut when the phone rang.

"No car there," Kate said. "Nothing. But why don't the two of you come over here?"

At the station she said, "Frankly, Mr. Reeves, I thought we'd find your sister's car at the bottom of that quarry, with her in it. Does that shock you?"

"I was braced to accept it, I'm afraid."

"So let's get down to brass



tacks. Your sister came here to talk to Sarah Woodlin. Something happened—we've no idea what. We do know those people couldn't have handled her disappearance by themselves, though. They'd have needed help."

"Danny Elder?"

"That's what I think. I don't believe he went there that evening to fix any pipe; he was sent for to get rid of your sister's car. Victor Mayne hasn't driven since his accident." Kate stood up. "I'm going to the Elders' right now to bring that boy here for a talk."

"I'd like to be here," Mark said.

"Of course. Both of you. But for the moment why don't you go for a little walk or something while I write down what I want to ask that boy?"

Kim and Mark went out together.

The road there was bordered by woods. As they walked side by side along its shoulder, their hands sometimes touching, Mark returned to the conversation begun at the motel. "How did you happen to come here to teach?" he asked.

"There was a job here, and I thought it might be fun to teach history in a place where so much of it happened."

"Has it been fun?"

"I'm sure it would have been,

had I been able to find a less spooky place to live."

"I don't like the idea of your being at the Woodlins' after what's happened."

"I'll be all right."

The house on Mill Brook Road was not something Mark wanted to talk about at the moment.

"Where are you from, originally?"

"The western part of the state. A town no bigger than this."

"A small-town girl."

"That's bad?"

"Of course not. It's just that I've never known a small-town girl before, and you keep doing things that surprise me. The chance you took to tell me the Woodlins were lying about my sister's car, for instance. What made you do that?"

She turned to face him. "Do you remember some time ago, in New York, a girl was brutally beaten on a crowded street in broad daylight? And of all the people who watched it happen, not one tried to help her?"

He nodded.

"Something like that happened to a schoolmate of mine. I resolved then and there never to be the kind of person who would turn her back when she could help someone in trouble."

"So that was your motivation."

"Well, it was my original motivation."

"And now?"

"Now I like you."

*Now I like you.* The forthrightness of it haunted him even after they returned to the police station. He thought about it all the while they waited for Kate Kendall to come back with Danny Elder.

*Now I like you.* After what he had been through, the words were healing.

Kate Kendall marched Danny into the station from her car, sat him in front of her desk, and glowered at him. He wore a shirt now, along with the soiled jeans and shabby sneakers.

With the atmosphere established to her liking, Kate proceeded to tell the youth what he had done.

"You didn't go to the Woodlins' to fix any pipe, did you? And it wasn't your old station wagon Miss Barton saw there. They sent for you to get rid of Miss Reeves's car. Told you to dispose of it in the quarry. But you just left it there, planning to go back for it when things cooled down. That's it, isn't it, Danny?"

The boy's long blond hair swished as he shook his head in vehement denial. "No, Miz Kendall, it ain't!"

"All right, then. Suppose you tell me what did happen."

He leaned toward her, talking partly with his hands. "Ma'am, it's true I never used my own car that night. But you got the rest all wrong. What happened, I was on my way over to Miz Woodlin's to fix the pipe—"

"On foot, I suppose you mean."

"Yeah, on foot. I cut through the woods to save time, and found the station wagon in there at the quarry with the key in it, like whoever left it there only meant to walk around or somethin', but never came back. Like maybe, you know, they fell in the water and drowned."

Kate's craggy face was a thundercloud.

"Go on."

"Well, I hung around and nobody showed up, so I—well, I just got in the car and drove it off. I drove it to Miz Woodlin's and parked it out front where Miz Barton here says she seen it. But when I was leavin', the Woodlins asked whose car it was, and told me to take it back or folks would say I stole it."

This time Kate said nothing. Mark could see she was shaken by the apparent logic of Danny's tale.

"So that's what I done," the youth concluded. "I took the car back there and left it where I found it."

"Where you found it," Kate repeated.

"Yeah. And I ain't seen it since. Honest."

It seemed to Mark the silence in the room would endure forever, but Kate finally said, "All right, Danny, I'll take you back." To Mark and Kim she added unhappily, "Just goes to show, doesn't it, how things can seem to be what they're not."

She opened the door and Danny slouched out, grinning in triumph—though maybe the grin, Mark thought, was something else that seemed to be what it was not. Kate closed the door behind them, leaving Mark to drive Kim home.

On the way Kim said, "Danny was lying, wasn't he?"

"I think so. His story seemed pretty thin in places."

"Such as?"

"If all he did was find the car and drive it to the Woodlins', why did they insist it was never there? Telling the truth wouldn't have hurt them or Danny."

"But by lying they were hindering you in finding your sister."

For a time they rode in silence.

"Furthermore," Kim said, "the only people Prue came in contact with, that we know of, are those at the Woodlin house. I'll keep my eyes and ears open, Mark."

"Be careful. If they think you're onto something—"

"I won't do anything foolish."

With an uneasy feeling that he had better come up with some answers quickly or she might risk her life to help him, Mark glumly watched her get out of the car and disappear into the house.

**I**n the morning, confiding in no one, Mark drove alone to Danny Elder's. It seemed a peaceful enough place in its rustic setting, nothing in its dusty somnolence indicating that Kate Kendall had caused any consternation by her interrogation of Danny. As he turned into the yard he looked apprehensively for the dog Kate had warned about, but saw no sign of it.

Danny's old station wagon was gone.

The back door opened as he reached it, and a woman about Sarah Woodlin's age squinted out at him. Danny's grandmother, he guessed.

"Is Danny at home, Mrs. Elder?"

She shook her head. "Nor Clay, neither. Only me."

Should he try to talk to her? What he had come for was to confront the boy with certain probing questions that Kate had neglected to ask. He didn't think the old woman could answer them.

"Do you know when he might

be here, Mrs. Elder?"

"Uh-uh. No idea."

"Well, thanks." He started back to his car, but something on the ground caught his eyes. Bending over, he picked up a shiny steel ball.

Danny's grandmother was still in the doorway when he turned. Walking back, he extended his hand with the missile in his palm. "This looks like a bearing. Has Danny been working on his car?"

"Since Tuesday mornin', but that ain't from the car. He was out here practicin' this mornin' with his slingshot." She snorted. "Stones ain't good enough. He has to waste his money on those things."

*Since Tuesday morning.* So Danny *had* gone to the Woodlins' on foot that night and *could* have found Prue's car at the quarry. But he had also taken part in the ambush.

On his way to the car Mark idly tossed the ball into the air a few times and caught it. Perhaps his show of indifference would persuade the old lady there was nothing to his keeping the thing, and she would not report it to Danny.

Should he go to the police station and tell Kate what he had learned? No. For one thing, she might not be there and he would only be wasting precious time. For another, with her gullible

acceptance of Danny's story, he had lost some of his respect for her.

He began, instead, a stakeout of the Elder house.

It was not easy. To observe without being seen, he had to park in the woods on the other side of the road. From there he could see only the ruts leading into the yard.

In about an hour Danny and his father returned in Danny's green station wagon. But neither reappeared. At dark Mark had to abandon his surveillance.

But he was back the next morning, and at nine fifteen the old car rattled out of the Elders' yard with Danny alone in it. When it was a safe distance down the road, Mark pulled out of hiding and followed.

Several miles of back roads later, Danny turned in at an abandoned farm on a dirt road. Only the fieldstone foundation remained of what must have been the house. But an ancient barn still struggled to stand, and its twin doors wore a padlock.

Danny's car vanished behind the barn, but a moment later the boy appeared on foot and put a key to the padlock. Then, dragging one of the heavy doors partly open, he slipped inside and pulled it shut after him.

Mark drove on past, stopping

where his car could not be seen from the barn. Walking back, he found beside the road a broken stone wall that would hide him while he watched.

The sun climbed the morning sky and insects hummed in the heated air. A pair of gray squirrels played tag on the old house foundation. It was nearly noon. Then the barn door shuddered open again and Danny reappeared. After relocking the door, he went around back for his car and drove away.

Mark waited until the station wagon was out of sight, then hurried forward through the knee-high grass. He could not force the padlock, he saw at once; it was almost new. Slowly he walked around the barn seeking another means of entry.

There were many half-rotted boards. At the back he found two together that looked decayed enough to be broken off. Bracing himself, he hauled on them until they snapped. After a check of the road to be sure he was still alone, he wriggled through the opening.

The barn was an eerie place, semi-dark, with dust motes dancing in thin beams of sunlight from gaps in roof and walls. An old tractor stood rusting. A wheelless buggy with rotting top rested on blocks of wood. Spiders had spun webs

everywhere, and small live creatures made rustling sounds in accumulations of trash as he advanced.

The thing he sought stood just inside the big twin doors. Prue's car, which he had last seen at the quarry.

Parts of it were missing now. Some of the body had been stripped off—and disposed of too, apparently, since the pieces were nowhere to be seen. The engine, lifted out with a chain hoist that still hung from an overhead beam, lay on the floor with a box of tools beside it.

Danny must now be arrested and questioned again. This time, questioned properly.

Crouching, he squeezed through the opening where he had broken the boards out. Or part way through. When something slammed into his forearm and sent a shock-wave of pain to his shoulder, he hastily drew back.

After striking him, the missile fell to the ground outside the aperture and, dully shining, lay there in the sunlight. Another of the steel balls Danny Elder used for ammunition. Even as he stared at it, a second one barely missed him as it flashed into the barn's gloom.

The pain in his forearm slowly subsided, leaving only a dull ache. The arm had saved him, he realized. In groping through

the opening he had thrust it out in front of him just in time to keep the missile from smashing his face. Danny was a good shot.

He looked for something to use as a weapon. A jackstraw pile of old lumber lay nearby. Darting to it, he jerked out an arm-long piece of two-by-four and ran back to the wall.

He must be very quiet. Danny must be led to think the slingshot pellets had done their job.

Scarcely breathing, he held the two-by-four above his head and waited, like a batter awaiting a pitch. Time crawled.

Five minutes must have passed before he sensed that the one stalking him was just outside. Even then he was aware of nothing more, really, than a whisper of grass moving and a faint change in the quality of the light shining through the aperture.

Drawing in a deep, silent breath, he braced himself.

A hand appeared at the edge of the opening. A blond head intruded, eyes straining to probe the barn's dimness. The two-by-four descended.

With a grunt Danny Elder slumped to the ground and lay still, half in and half out of the gap. As Mark dragged him fully into the barn, he saw that one hand still gripped a slingshot.

But in a moment the boy's eyes flickered open. Gazing up

into Mark's face, he made a sudden panicky effort to escape.

Pinning him down, Mark said grimly, "Don't try it."

"You got nothin' on me!"

"Only a stolen car and two attacks with a slingshot. And perhaps a murder." Twisting the weapon out of Danny's fingers, Mark thrust it into his pocket.

Still gripping the two-by-four in one hand, he hauled the youth erect. "Let's go. You first."

But it would not be easy, he realized. Though Danny was groggy he was not really hurt, and it was a long way to the car. And even if he were able to get Danny to the car, what then? A tough, resourceful kid like this was going to sit placidly beside him while he drove to the police station?

Moreover, his arm was beginning to stiffen. The steel ball must have bruised it, perhaps even cracked a bone. He was out of his depth here. And now Danny was aware of it. Derision curled the boy's mouth.

"Out to the road," Mark said.

"Sure, mister."

"You make one wrong move and I'll use this club again."

"Yeah."

Suddenly, without warning, Danny Elder burst into a run. But at the edge of the road toward which he ran, a familiar

figure stepped from behind a screen of bushes.

Danny frantically changed direction. The figure halted, took aim with a revolver, and shouted, "Stop right there, Danny Elder, or I'll shoot!"

Danny stopped. And Kate Kendall, briskly advancing through the tall grass, halted ten feet from him. "Now you walk out to the road ahead of me, and don't try to be smart. Mr. Reeves, are you all right?"

"Yes, but glad to see you," Mark said wryly.

"I expect you are."

She marched Danny to where Mark had left his car. Her car was there, too. "Guess we'd better use yours," she said, "so you can do the driving while I keep a rein on this boy. We can come back for mine later."

Mark got behind the wheel. Prodding Danny onto the seat behind him, Kate got in and sat facing him, still holding the gun. "We'll just go to the station," she said. And as Mark put the car in motion: "Is your sister's station wagon back there in that barn, Mr. Reeves?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. How'd you find it?"

"I was convinced he had it, so I watched his house."

"H'm," Kate said. "Well, I was convinced he had it, too. Only difference is, I made a list

of the places I thought he might have hidden it, and went looking. That old barn was number four on my list. Saw your car, though, before I got to it. You want to tell me what happened?"

He did, and she said to Danny, "What brought you back to the barn on foot after you drove away?"

"I come for some tools," Danny said sullenly.

"Tools?"

"My car quit on me down the road a ways."

"Well, well," Kate said. "Now isn't that ironical?"

At the police station Kate displayed a tenacity that made Mark wonder how he ever could have thought her incompetent. At first Danny Elder, handcuffed and ordered to "sit there and tell the truth for a change," would only say, "I ain't talkin!" But Kate persisted. For forty-five minutes she thundered accusations, hissed questions, lashed him with words as though they were whips.

In the end she reduced him from a tough, sneering adult to a sniveling teenager who wanted only an end to his torment. That done, Kate removed the cuffs.

"Now suppose we begin at the beginning," she said then. "All



this talk about you going to the Woodlins' that night to fix a pipe *was* just a coverup, wasn't it?"

He nodded.

"They phoned you to come? Real late?"

Again a nod.

"And when you got there, what did you find?"

"The blue station wagon was there in the driveway. I was to drive it to the quarry and get rid of it."

"Who told you to do that?"

"Miz Daphne."

"But you didn't do it, did you?"

He jerked his head from side to side.

"I was right when I talked to you before, wasn't I? You just couldn't waste that lovely station wagon, so you left it there at the quarry and meant to go back for it. Then Mr. Reeves here began to dig too deep into what was going on, and you decided he had to be kept quiet."

"Not me," Danny said. "Miz Daphne."

"Daphne again?"

"We couldn't have you and Mr. Reeves snoopin' around so much, she said. Then she give me the note for Mr. Reeves and told me what I had to do when he showed up at the quarry."

"And what was that?"

"Get him with my slingshot, then put him in the car and

push it into the water where no one would ever find it."

Mark said, repressing a shudder, "There was a man with you at the quarry when you tried to ambush me. Who was he? Your father?"

"Uh-uh. My old man don't know nothin' about any of this. It was Mr. Mayne."

After a moment of silence Kate said, "What do you know about this man's missing sister, Danny?"

"Nothin', Miz Kendall. I swear! I don't know nothin'!"

"You'd better not be lying again. What happened when Mr. Reeves got away from you at the quarry? What did Sarah and the others do then?"

"Mr. Mayne told me to get the car and hide it someplace."

"So you drove it to the old Layden barn to dismantle it. And what were you planning to do with the pieces, may I ask? Except those you meant to keep for yourself, of course."

The phone on Kate's desk rang but she ignored it, waiting for Danny's reply. Danny said, "I planned to bury 'em in the field there."

Kate plucked the phone from its cradle. "Police. Kate Kendall here." As she listened, her face filled with frown lines.

The caller was a woman, Mark guessed from the sound of the voice. But suddenly the voice

fell silent and Kate, looking alarmed, said sharply. "Kim? Kim! What's wrong?"

With real fear in her eyes she looked at Mark. "She made a gasping sound, then someone slammed the phone down. She was telling me—" Kate shot to her feet. "Never mind! Come on!"

In her rush to the door she paused to glare at Danny. "You stay right here, Danny Elder, or you'll be sorry. You hear?" Then with Mark at her heels she was outside, running to Mark's car.

"The Woodlin place! Fast!"

When the car was out of the yard, racing down the road, Mark said fearfully, "What was Kim telling you?"

"She said, 'Kate, I'm at the Woodlins'. Kate, I've just found something terribly important. I think I've discovered *why* Mark's sister disappeared.'" Glancing at the trees flying by, Kate winced. "Slow down, will you? I didn't mean for you to kill us."

Mark cut the speed only a little. When he made the now familiar turn onto Mill Brook Road, the car swayed dangerously. He didn't care. If anything happened to Kim Barton, his life would lose all the meaning that had suddenly, wonderfully, come into it.

When they reached the old

house he was racing up the piazza steps before Kate could get out of the car. Ignoring the bell, he tried to thrust the door open, but it was locked. He had to tug at the bell-knob and wait, fuming, until someone came. His apprehension made the waiting an eternity.

It was the old lady who opened the door. Blinking in apparent surprise, she said, "Mr. Reeves? I didn't know we were expecting you today."

"We're coming in, Sarah," Kate Kendall snapped.

With a childish pout the old lady stepped back, allowing them to pass her. She was not wearing the purple velvet this time. Her attire was an ordinary housedress. She wore the band of purple around her neck, though, and nervously fingered the bow at her throat.

Kate went on into the first of the two living rooms, with Mark trailing. The older daughter, doing needlepoint, looked up.

"Leila," Kate said, "we're looking for Kim Barton."

"I don't believe she's here."

"Where is she?"

"Why, I'm afraid I can't say, Miss Kendall. We went to Salem to do some shopping, and only just got back."

"Where's your sister and her husband?"

"I'll try to find them for you." Putting the needlepoint aside,

Leila stood up. "Just a moment, please."

She hurried into the adjoining room and Mark heard her calling, "Daphne! Victor! Where are you?" But he had no intention of waiting around just to be lied to by more members of the Woodlin clan. With a curt "I'll be back" to Kate, he made for the rear of the house.

He had not been in that part of the house before, but all he wanted was a back door. Finding one, he jerked it open.

There between house and barn, where she had said she always kept it, was Kim's car. A second car, older and bigger, evidently belonged to the Woodlins.

Returning to the front of the house, he ran up the stairs. Kim had said her room was over the front living room. Its door was closed, but when he turned the knob it opened.

She was not there. But she had not left the house, either—or if she had, she had gone without her handbag, which lay on the bureau. Impatiently he turned it upside down and spilled its contents onto the bed.

Would Kim have left her car keys and more than forty dollars in an unlocked room? In *this* house?

Fearing the worst, he hurried back downstairs. Sarah, her two daughters, and Victor

Mayne sat in the front living room like silent judges at some ancient trial. He felt his skin crawl as he passed through.

Kate was in the other living room, frowning at a telephone on a Governor Winthrop desk. "Sarah says Kim went out about ten minutes ago," she told him. "The others say she was not here when they returned from Salem just before *we* got here."

"I think they're lying. Her bag is in her room with car keys and money in it. Her car is in the yard." He frowned at the desk. "Is this the phone she was using?"

"There's only the one. She must have been standing—" Kate suddenly looked down at the carpet, then knelt to examine it. It was an old Axminster, threadbare and faded. "Here! Look here!" she said triumphantly.

Hunkering down beside her, Mark saw she was pointing at two dark spots.

"Blood," Kate said. "At least, I think it is." Her fingers darted beyond the spots to snatch at something else. "And see this! And this! Bits of a broken vase!"

Mark could only nod.

She rose with the fragments of pottery clutched in her hand. "Kim was standing here talking to me, and someone came up behind—" Turning, she peered at a door beyond the

desk. "Uh-huh. There used to be a gray vase on that little table. Someone came through that door, caught her phoning me, picked up the vase, and—" The music for marching was at full volume now, and Kate's eyes glittered. "Here!" Snatching her revolver from its holster, she pressed it into Mark's hand. "Keep an eye on those people while I look around!"

With a feeling he was being sucked into the vortex of a nightmare, Mark walked woodenly into the adjoining room and stood against the wall. The Woodlins censured him with their eyes. Not a word was spoken.

Kate, returning in five minutes, marched into the room and planted herself before Sarah Woodlin's chair. Into Sarah's lap she dropped half a dozen pieces of a shattered gray vase.

"This is what you hit her with while she was phoning me. Now where is she?"

"I don't know what in the world you're talking about."

"You should have buried this broken vase, Sarah, but there wasn't time, was there? So, being a creature of habit, you threw it in the trash barrel on the back porch."

"Really, Kate!"

"I found your purple dress, too. Knew you must've been wearing it because you've still

got the band around your neck. You should've got rid of that, too, instead of dropping it into the dirty-clothes hamper. Shall I get it and show you the spots of blood on it, Sarah? Or are you going to tell us where Kim is?"

"I'll tell you nothing, Kate Kendall!"

*"Where is she, Sarah? What have you done with her?"*

The old lady pressed her lips together and gazed into space.

"All right, then." Kate shot a glance at Victor Mayne and the two daughters, but apparently decided it would be a waste of time to shift her attack to them. She turned to Mark. "Guard them. I'm going to really search this house. And the barn." Spinning on one foot, she ran like a sprinter from the room.

Anger seethed in Mark as he glared at the four persons seated before him. "Mrs. Woodlin," he heard himself saying in the voice of a stranger, "if you've hurt my sister and Kim Barton, I—"

"You'll do what?" Sarah defiantly challenged.

"I won't stop until I see you rotting in prison!" In a fury he swung on the drab man who was married to Daphne. "Mayne, for God's sake can't you make her talk?"

"I don't cut any ice around here, mister."

"You helped Danny Elder ambush me at the quarry, damn you!"

Mayne recoiled as though struck, and suddenly Mark regretted having spoken. Before, Mayne had appeared to be no more than a spectator in the struggle with Sarah. Now his face was concrete-hard and his eyes were cold with menace.

How long would it take Kate to search the premises? Perhaps a long time. This old house had many rooms, a cellar, an attic. The barn was big, too. Meanwhile, Mayne's gaze chilled him with its intensity, and old Sarah, clapping her hands, giggled to herself like a delighted child.

Time crawled until Kate returned.

"Nothing in the house," she said. "But there's a trap door in the floor of that barn, and a root cellar under it. And I found a half-empty bowl of food there, and a pail somebody's been using for a toilet. I suspect your sister was imprisoned there until Kim created a problem with her phone call."

"My dear," Sarah said sweetly, "you're just wasting everybody's time and patience. Why don't you go home and leave us in peace?"

Kate ignored her. "Kim's here somewhere, Mark. Maybe Prudence, too. There wasn't time

to carry out any elaborate scheme for disposing of them. Mark, there could be a built-in hiding place in this house. Lots of these old houses had them. Aren't you an architect?"

He nodded.

"Then can't you find it by measuring walls and things? Sarah!" Kate swung on the old lady. "Get me a tape measure!"

"Get your own."

Mark said quickly, "I've a tape in my car," and handed Kate the revolver. He was back in a moment. When he hesitated, trying to decide where to begin, Kate said, "Start here. If these others did go shopping, Sarah was alone here, and she couldn't have carried Kim up or down stairs by herself."

"Yes, start here!" Sarah clapped her hands. "Maybe we'll find a secret treasure!" Glee-fully she bounced to her feet.

Her daughters and Victor Mayne remained seated, like a group of woodenly stiff figures in a bad painting.

The old lady trailed Mark about, watching his every move as he swiftly made measurements and jotted his findings in a notebook. She was hugely enjoying herself. Time and again he had to push her away as she pressed against him to see what he was writing.

He wondered why Kate did not order her to desist. But

Kate, also trailing him about, made no comment.

Finding nothing in the room where Kim had been struck down, he hurried into the hall. There his gaze touched the main staircase, and a feeling of frustration all but crushed him.

The house was so big! Even with the search limited to the ground floor, the task could take hours. And if Kate were wrong—if the old lady *had* had help in dragging Kim up those stairs or down into the cellar . . .

In haste he measured the base of the staircase and yanked open the door of an under-stairs closet. A door-controlled light flashed on. Garments of various kinds hung there on a wooden rod. He shoved them aside. The floor was littered with overshoes, rubbers, bundles of old newspapers. He kicked them out behind him. The rear of the closet's plastered ceiling sloped to the floor at the angle of the staircase above it.

Nothing. He was wasting time. Impatiently he turned away.

But as he did so, a bell jangled in his mind and an inner voice crackled, "Hold it! That closet isn't deep enough!"

At the same moment Kate Kendall, peering at Sarah Woodlin, said crisply over her shoulder, "You're onto something, Mark. Her face says so!

Look in there again!"

He glanced at Sarah's face and realized why Kate had let the old lady follow him around. Fear had replaced the mockery.

He plunged into the closet again. That ceiling at the rear, sloping down to the floor, had to be the answer. With the closet shorter than the base of the staircase above, there had to be a space behind it. His knuckles beat a tattoo and the sound was hollow.

His hands, gliding over the plaster, became those of a blind man reading an unseen face.

Suddenly there was a sharp click, and a section of the back wall dropped onto his fingertips. He lowered it to the floor, exposing a wedge of space under the foot of the stairs.

"Kim!"

But the dungeon held *two* women, both so immobilized they could not stir. His sister Prue was gagged with a towel and bound with rope. Kim Barton lay beside her with a trickle of blood on her forehead, entangled in a web of plastic clothesline and gagged with strips of bedsheet. Some papers lay scattered on the floor.

Mark cracked a shoulder on the underside of the staircase as he went to his knees, but in his agony of foreboding he felt little. Kim's eyes were closed. It might be too late.

But when he touched her, her eyes flickered open.

Gently he drew her out of the secret compartment into the hall, then returned for his sister. In the hall the usually stern face of Kate Kendall wore an expression of profound relief. Sarah Woodlin leaned against the wall, staring at the floor.

It took him a few minutes to remove the gags and bonds from the rescued women. His sister embraced him; Kim reached for his hands. Kate said, "Maybe you should help Kim wash that blood from her face, Mark."

He did so, and Kate was in the front living room with the others when the two of them returned. His sister was saying to Kate, "I wasn't under the stairs long. They had me tied up in a root cellar under the barn—after knocking me out with something in a cup of tea, I mean. It wasn't very pleasant, I can tell you."

"I've seen that cellar," Kate said. "I can imagine."

"I guess they didn't know what to do with me. Then this evening they dragged me up out of there and put me under the stairs with this other girl—to get rid of both of us together, I suppose." Prue finally broke under the strain. "Oh, my God, they're terrible people! Especially that one!" She stabbed a finger at Sarah. "Even the

others are afraid of her!"

"Because they don't know how to handle her," Kate said crisply. "But I do. And I'm going to, now that I've got enough to make it stick."

Mark had become aware that one person was missing. "Where's Mayne?"

Kate glared at the two daughters. "These two let him walk out while we were in the hall."

"What happened wasn't his fault," Daphne wailed. "He never wanted to be involved!"

Kate looked at Mark and shrugged. "Victor just announced he'd had enough and walked out, they say. It seems he and the two ladies here *were* shopping in Salem today and only did get back just before we arrived."

Kim said, "They weren't here when I phoned you. Only Sarah."

"And she caught you phoning."

"I thought she was in her room upstairs."

"I'd better use the phone myself," Kate said, "to make sure friend Victor doesn't get too far."

Victor's wife, Daphne, stopped sniveling and plucked at Kate's sleeve. "Please, Kate! He was only trying to help us!"

"Like he helped your mother keep this poor woman in the root cellar for a week?" Kate



swung on the old lady. "Come to think of it, Sarah, just how did you get her out of that cellar if you were here alone?"

"She wasn't alone then," Prue said. "The others had returned."

Kate glared at the daughters again. "What did you have in mind to *do* with Prudence, anyway? Just keep her down there till she died of terror?"

"It was mother's doing, Kate. Please!"

"And you covered up for her. All you had to do was pick up the phone, or speak out when I came here."

The daughters of Sarah Woodlin hung their heads.

"Furthermore," Kate grimly went on, "your Victor was party to an attempt on Mr. Reeves's life at the quarry. Remember *that*."

The daughters looked accusingly at Sarah, and suddenly Victor Mayne's wife burst into uncontrollable sobbing. The other said in a dead voice, "Now see what you've done, Mother. Now we've *both* lost our husbands."

Sarah, with a toss of her head, walked away and sat down.

Returning from the telephone, Kate said, "I looked out back and the car is still there, so he must have gone on foot, still afraid to drive. He won't

get far. I asked for assistance here, too." She touched Kim on the hand. "While we're waiting, why don't you tell us what happened?"

"I was hoping to find the answer to Prue's disappearance," Kim said. "I managed to get that Governor Winthrop desk open with a hairpin—she's always kept it locked—and I found some papers about the Reeveses and a diary in it."

"Where are they now?"

"Still there, I suppose. I just looked at them and put them back. Then I phoned you."

"I'll have a look," Kate said, and left the room. But she returned shaking her head. "She must have moved them. Destroyed them, probably, if she had the time."

"Of course I destroyed them!" Sarah said triumphantly. "You don't think I'm crazy, do you?"

"I think you're crazy, yes. But not all the time."

"Well, you won't find my diary. Or any papers, either. They're gone forever."

Kim said; "The papers appeared to be some kind of report she had prepared for Prue, tracing the Reeves family back to the old days in Salem. The diary was the shocker. There were half a dozen entries about Prue, leading up to a revelation that—"

"Hold on a minute," Mark in-

interrupted. "Wait." Striding into the hall, he hurried to the niche under the stairs and gathered up the papers he had seen on the floor there. Obviously Kim hadn't noticed them when she was rescued and had been unaware of them before because she'd been unconscious when dragged in there. There was a notebook among them. When he re-entered the living room with his find, Sarah Woodlin closed her eyes in defeat.

He handed Kim the diary, and she fingered its pages. "Listen to this: 'Today I answered a letter I found in a magazine, from a woman named Reeves who thinks she may be descended from the Reeveses of Salem. Now wouldn't it be the answer to my lifelong prayers if she is.'"

Again Kim turned pages. "And this: 'Today I received another letter from Prudence Reeves, with more information. She is descended from the Salem Reeveses, I am certain.'"

Again the rustling of the pages was the only sound. "And now just listen to *this* entry, dated the day before Prue arrived here," Kim said. "'Yesterday I finished my investigation, and now I know for sure that Prudence is a direct des-

cendant of the Reeves woman who testified against my poor ancestor, Sarah Abbott, causing Sarah to be hanged as a witch. And tomorrow she will be here! At long last, after all these years, the score can be settled and my Sarah Abbott can rest in peace.'"

Closing the book, Kim handed it to Kate Kendall, who gazed stonily in accusing silence at Sarah Woodlin.

"I suppose you'll put me in prison now," Sarah said.

"You'll certainly be put somewhere."

With a toss of her head the old lady looked at her daughters. "Well, that ought to make *you* two happy. You'll have the house to yourselves at last."

"Sarah," Kate said, "don't you realize you meant to murder someone?"

"Of course I do. And she'd have deserved it."

It was all over, Mark realized. Victor Mayne might be caught or might not be; it made no difference. If he had a bad heart, he might not even live to be caught. Danny Elder would be punished somehow. This was the end.

He looked at Kim and knew that, for him, it might also be a beginning.

# UNSOLVED

by Roger Hufford

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the March issue.

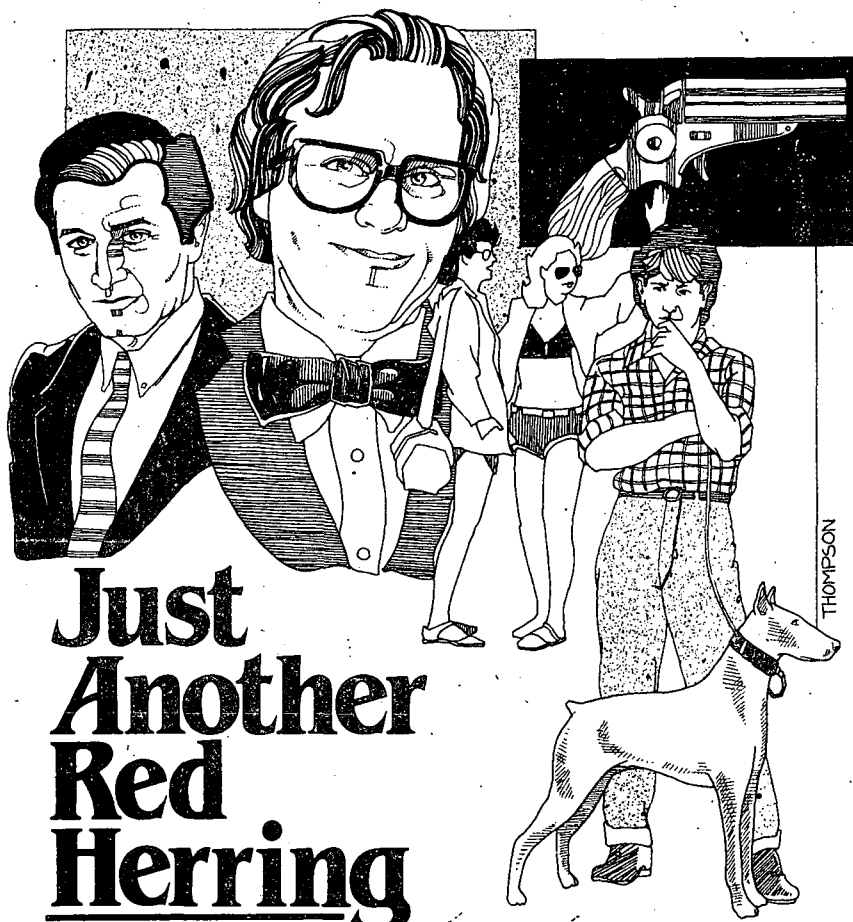
The Pottstown Pelicans' infielders always tell the truth and their outfielders always lie. The trouble comes with the pitcher and the catcher, who alternate between lying and telling the truth from one statement to the next. You can't even be sure whether their first statement will be a true one or a false one.

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <i>Matt</i> | Yuri is the right fielder.<br>Will is the catcher.        |
| <i>Nat</i>  | Pat is the shortstop.<br>Will is the right fielder.       |
| <i>Pat</i>  | Matt is the catcher.<br>Stan is the first baseman.        |
| <i>Ron</i>  | Yuri is the pitcher.<br>Tim is the third baseman.         |
| <i>Stan</i> | Pat is the pitcher.<br>Tim is the shortstop.              |
| <i>Tim</i>  | Matt is the second baseman.<br>Ron is the center fielder. |
| <i>Will</i> | Zeke is the third baseman.<br>Stan is the center fielder. |
| <i>Yuri</i> | Nat is the first baseman.<br>Zeke is the left fielder.    |
| <i>Zeke</i> | Nat is not an infielder.<br>Ron doesn't pitch or catch.   |

*Who is the left fielder?*

See page 130 for the solution to the January puzzle.

*"The Perfidious Pottstown Pelicans' Pitcher and Catcher," taken from Challenging Puzzles in Logic by Roger Hufford. Copyright © 1982 by Roger Hufford. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.*



# Just Another Red Herring

by R. M. Tappy

**M**y Uncle Elwyn solved the murders. He always claims he solves all my cases. Just because I look like a very tall Howdy Doody, he thinks I'm a crummy private detective. I don't know about that, but I wouldn't have found the solution to this case without him, that's for sure.

We were working on the boat—it's an ancient wooden day sailer that hasn't seen a sail in twenty years—when the solution ap-

*Illustration by George Thompson*

peared. It didn't, of course, have "Case Solved" written on it; in fact, I didn't even see it right off. Uncle Elwyn had looked up to gaze at the passing Newport Beach scene when he said, "Hey, Lester, there's a red one! You don't see many of those!" Uncle Elwyn was being his usual confusing self. A "red one" could've been anything from a balloon to a '56 Chevy.

I looked across the street and saw two teenage heartbreakers in maroon short-shorts, an elegant old duchess-type with a huge, scarlet leather purse, and a guy in a red plaid shirt walking a red Doberman—you know, the ones that are reddish brown and reddish tan where regular Dobermans are black and tan. A big dog, it walked the way most Dobermans walk, like it packed a revolver and knew how to use it. It didn't bat an eye, however, as two little kids ran out from one of the nearby houses chasing a cat, which ran practically under the dog's nose.

I was, therefore, mildly shocked when, as the duchess passed the dog, he lunged at her handbag and started to bark. The duchess began screaming with great force. The man, who sported a pair of jug-handled ears, offered apologies and ordered the dog to heel. The dog heeled, growling. The duchess ranted about vicious animals and public safety. Jugears, backing up and apologizing desperately, tripped on the dog, who glared at him but didn't move a muscle. The duchess haughtily demanded Jugears' name and address. He apparently gave it while the duchess continued to grumble.

I lost interest, since I couldn't hear any more that was being said, and anyway the heartbreakers, now that the show was over, had crossed the street and were peering into Uncle Elwyn's boat. I turned my gaze to their halter tops and thought about launching into my "skipper-during-the-America's-Cup-yacht-race" line when Uncle Elwyn said, "Your glasses are fogging." The heartbreakers giggled; I bashed my knee on the boat as I turned to frown at Uncle Elwyn, forgetting to ask him which "red one" he was talking about.

A big mistake, as it turned out—because a few days later as I watched the police drag a body from under a dock, I could've used a clue.

“S ince when do street crimes interest Lester Monro?” Lieutenant Paley Davis sneered in my ear as I leaned my bike against an overturned rowboat.

“It's not a street crime, it's a water crime.” I used

my most smart-alecky voice; it drove Davis crazy. "He's in the water."

"He's a coke dealer. He's dead. It's a street crime." Davis is the only human I know who really can snarl and talk at the same time. He likes to think he's a hard-nosed cop from the Bronx or something. Actually, he's never been out of Orange County.

"You still didn't answer my question." He glared at me. "What's an idiot private eye doin' up at seven A.M. lookin' at a body on a public dock?"

"The early bird catches the fish." I grinned and pointed to the bag on the back of my bicycle. "I've been partaking of the bounty of the catch."

"Partakin' of the bounty of the catch?" Davis snorted. "Did you learn that stuff at Stanford or are you writin' a romance novel?" Stanford. Davis thinks I'm an intellectual snob. I'd learned a lot up north having nothing to do with academics. Sid—"Mr. Grenville to you, kid!"—the private detective who'd hired me to run errands and clean his office, trained me to look inconspicuous, be nosy, and get results. "Lester Monro-o-o," he'd sing out—he never talked in a normal manner when he could sing—"you're so wimpy-looking, you're going to be a great detective! No bad guy will believe you!" He was right. His murder became my first solo investigation. The bad guys never suspected me till the jail door slammed behind them. Someday I'd have to tell Davis about it; maybe he'd change his mind about me.

I was startled out of my daydream by a loud snapping sound. A big racing sloop had tacked close by the dock with the usual clanging of halyards and cracking of sails. The cops had finished taking pictures of the body and were packing to leave. Davis was getting into his car when I caught up with him.

"That makes four coke dealers in five days, doesn't it?" I said, leaning on the car door.

"Five," Davis muttered. "The John Doe we found two days ago has been I.D.'d. He'd been dealing on the campus."

"Somebody seems to be trying to corner the market in coke, the hard way."

"You think so?" Davis, suddenly angry, tried to start the car and flooded the engine. "Well, have you heard of lots of coke for sale lately, real cheap, or of anybody having a lot to get rid of?"

"No," I said, "my few contacts in the drug world are complaining about the lack of supplies."

"Right. So instead of stupid remarks, why don't you use that overeducated brain of yours." Davis acted like he thought I was guilty, but I thought I heard a plea for help in his voice.

"Do I get access to police files, and can I talk to the witnesses?"

"If you get to my office before quittin' time." Davis got the car started and took off.

I ran to where I'd left my bicycle. Quitting time was nine hours away for Davis, but knowing him, he'd leave early just to annoy me.

Nine hours and two days later, I'd talked to all the witnesses and friends of the victims and waded through the misspelled police reports. I'd found out that the only things the victims had in common were that at some time before they died they'd been "holding" some coke—the police lab reports had turned up minute traces in the victims' clothes—and they'd all been shot at close range. All the victims, with one exception, were regular dealers, but not really bigtime criminals with large operations. The few witnesses hadn't heard shots but had seen the victims shortly before the killings. Nothing out of the ordinary had occurred; no mystery phone calls, no visitors, no known threats by strangers or friends. Just five dead guys who had come in contact with cocaine—and a killer.

I was turning all this over in my mind as I rode my bike to the courthouse. Davis's office was always a bit of a shock. It mostly resembled the elegant trophy room of an English manor house. Quite a contrast with his expression: he looked like the poor relation who didn't get named in the rich relative's will.

"Well, what've you come up with in the last two days?" He didn't bark at me, which made me realize how desperate he was.

"Seems to me as if somebody's out for revenge."

"Why do you say that?" Davis, suddenly wary, gave me his full attention.

"Well," I paused, thinking it over. "First, four of them have been dealers, and all five had coke taken from them at the time they were killed. That looks like the reason for the murders. Yet you and I agree that not only has there not been a lot of coke suddenly for sale, but supplies are actually drying up. So whoever it is doesn't appear to be hoarding the stuff, hoping to make some giant deal. We'd have heard about it.

"Two—it isn't vigilantes 'cause they'd send out an obvious warn-



ing, to take credit for the murders and to scare the other dealers off.

"And it isn't your basic nut," I said, waving three fingers. "It's too carefully planned: late at night, nobody hears anything, nobody's tied up or knifed, none of the usual nut stuff. Just two nice clean shots from a derringer."

"How'd you know about the derringer?" Davis bristled, grabbing for my fingers. "We only just identified the kind of gun used, since this last guy was the only person with the bullet still in him."

"The coroner lives down the street from my Uncle Elwyn. He helps out with the boat sometimes."

Davis relaxed. I continued. "A derringer is an elegant little gun; nuts usually use Saturday night specials. So that leaves carefully planned revenge."

"Okay." Davis offered me some M&M's from the rosewood humidor on his desk. "I go along with that, but how does the killer know one particular person is a dealer? The second victim—the kid at the party—wasn't even a user, much less a dealer. He'd had some coke on him—before the killer took it—that his older brother had given him. He was just helping his brother hide the stuff from their parents. The other kids at the party swore up and down that he never told them he had anything. I believe them." Davis sounded as if he did, too. "So how does the killer know?"

"I haven't figured that out yet." I knew all this stuff from the police reports. I shrugged and downed some more M&M's.

"Yeah? Well, when you figure it out, do tell the rest of us!" Davis jumped up from his desk with my dismemberment in his eyes.

I sure wouldn't keep it to myself, I thought as I walked out to my bicycle. I wasn't at all fond of drug dealers, but this guy was going around executing people like he was the last word in justice. I got on my bike and rode the long way to the Newport pier. I wondered what made a coke dealer look different from the rest of us. If you didn't buy from or sell cocaine to someone, you'd never know they had any. Coke addicts weren't physically obvious until they were pretty far gone, and all of the bodies found were dealers, not users, with the exception of the kid, who was neither.

I walked my bike along the beach, poking my toes in the sand. I stopped to watch two guys playing Frisbee-keep-away with a beautiful Irish setter. A throw went wild and the setter made a terrific leap, catching the Frisbee close to where I was standing.

It was obviously his Frisbee: its edges were frayed with teethmarks. I froze.

Of course! . . . I realized in a second the police blotter might have the answer I needed. I broke some speed records pedaling back to the police station.

“Aw right! Aw right! Calm down!” Davis was driving fast and glaring at me as I jumped around in the seat. I had been jumping around since I had run into his office ten minutes before.

“We’re in the car now, so tell me . . . !”

I was still out of breath. “Well . . . I saw the red dog and . . . teethmarks and . . . the address was on the incident report . . .”

“Forget I asked!” Davis turned the corner a little too sharply and came to an abrupt halt by a small green house. It matched the address I had gotten from the incident report, the police log of daily calls.

Davis glared some more as we got out of the car and opened the gate into the yard. The red Doberman galloped around the corner and voiced its suspicions. Jugears was right behind him, with the same expression.

I beat Davis to the question by half a second. “Hi, we’re from the police. We’d like to talk to you about some cocaine.”

Jugears turned so pale I thought he was going to faint. He abruptly sat down on the porch step and started to cry.

Half an hour later, Jugears had been read his rights and taken away. The backup unit we called was leaving with various dog-training paraphernalia, the dog (which hadn’t cooperated), and the derring (which had).

Davis watched them go and then turned to me. “He claims his kid brother died of an overdose and he’s had it in for the dealers since. Your revenge idea was right. He assumed anyone with cocaine on ’em must be a dealer, since a customer would’ve used the stuff right away. I told him about the kid at the party. He said it was a mistake. By the way—he dumped all the cocaine he took.” Davis looked up at me and started rocking back and forth on his heels. “I answered your questions, do you think now you could tell me how you had it figured?”

I stuck my hands in my pockets and tried to look modest. “Our big problem was how the murderer singled out the victims with

cocaine if he didn't see them with it, or hear somehow that they had it, or make a buy? Right?"

"Right."

"He smelled it. Or rather, he trained the dog to smell it."

Davis rocked a little slower, looking skeptical. He hadn't fully grasped Jugears' explanation about the dog's part in the crimes.

"Look," I explained, "you guys train dogs to sniff dope for legal reasons. All this guy did was train the dog to sniff it for illegal ones. The dog would sniff out who had the coke, and Jugears would follow and kill them when the opportunity was most favorable."

"How'd you know which dog? They're all over the place down here." Davis began fumbling in his pockets for something. Probably M&M's.

"I saw this guy on the street with the dog one day. It lunged at a lady's purse like there was something in it the dog wanted. Well-trained dogs don't do that, and you could tell this one was well trained by the way it walked and heeled when the guy told it to. It ignored a cat that ran right under its nose, so why go after a stranger's purse unless it was trained to react to what was in the purse?"

"Yeah, but . . ." Davis broke in.

"I know," I waved my arm, "I hadn't figured this out at the time, but I remembered it later. The woman said she was going to report him for having a vicious dog. That's why I checked the police blotter before I came to get you. She did report it. Jugears was so flustered, thinking the dog had made a mistake, that he gave the woman his correct address. We got lucky."

"The dog was wrong?" Davis stopped fumbling and looked puzzled.

"I called the woman, too. She'd just had sinus surgery. They give you cocaine by prescription for pain for that kind of surgery. She had quite a bit in her purse. The dog knew what he was doing."

Davis mulled it over. "The canine handlers think they can 'rehabilitate' the dog—you know, train him to obey them instead of his former owner." Davis suddenly grinned at me, pulled out his wallet, and tapped it on my chest. "Want a beer?"

I grinned back.

That's as close as he's ever come to "Thanks."

FICTION

# A Matter of Time

by Laura Watson  
Westervelt



Johnny Moss watched the children play in the park across the street. From his window table inside Molly's Cafe, he looked for the little black-haired Maria in the red shirt she usually wore. He didn't see her, so he sat back and waited for Roy Hart to come, as he did each morning.

The wait was especially long this morning, and Johnny was glad it was Saturday and the

sun was shining. It meant there were more people to watch, and most of them wore smiles because it wasn't raining again.

"Look at 'em out there," Roy muttered as he pulled up a chair across from Johnny and slid down into it. He always turned a chair backwards and straddled it the way Johnny had seen it done in Westerns. It looked right for Roy because no matter how long he'd been

*Illustration by Nick Jainschigg*

in the city and away from Hoggback, Wyoming, he still looked like a tall, gangly cowboy in city garb. People had called the two of them Mutt and Jeff when they worked together, and they did make a strange looking pair, with Roy almost six two and Johnny about five six and stocky. "Stocky" was actually no longer an accurate description of his pear-shaped, middle-aged body.

"It's like a bunch of flies let out of a corked bottle, the way they come out of those little apartment rooms. A week without sun makes the tension build," Roy observed.

Johnny nodded and ate some cold egg. Roy was late today, and Johnny took that to mean he had been up late working on the Sanchez preliminary. Sooner or later, Roy would talk about it, so Johnny ate his egg and waited.

"Makes it hard on us when people get tense," Roy said. He was still on the force, from which Johnny had retired two years earlier, and comments like that always made Johnny feel like an outsider. Not that Roy meant anything by it. He was about as good-natured and easy to get along with as you could ask for. But he did seem worried this morning. Johnny didn't think he was imagining it.

"Rain. Heat. It does things to

people." He looked at Johnny then, and Johnny knew he was talking about the murder.

"Number four, Roy?" big fat Molly bawled from behind the counter.

"Yeah." Roy ordered number four every morning. Why should today be any different? Two eggs over easy, four sausage links, toast, hash browns, juice, and coffee. And he would complain about the greasy hash browns. Some things didn't change, no matter what.

Today *was* different, though, because of the murder. They were both on edge. Johnny was trying to hide it, and he thought Roy was trying, too. Only Roy didn't hide things well.

Johnny knew Roy was handling the Sanchez case because Mrs. Gold had told him late the night before. She lived across the hall from him on the third floor and made it her job to know everything that happened in the building. All that he knew about the investigation so far came from her. It wasn't much, but he thought he could guess the rest. Roy would put things together piece by piece with that unfailing logic of his until finally he would know.

A bony man with long hair sauntered into the cafe, and both older men turned to watch him shuffle to a corner table. He mumbled his order for black

coffee over the counter to Molly as he passed. The overalls he wore were splattered with green and yellow paint from painting inside halls at a tenement restoration where he'd recently been hired.

"High as a kite," Roy muttered under his breath. "Not nine A.M. yet, and he's already out of it." He waited for Johnny to express disapproval in his turn, but Johnny just watched Beckman, the painter, as he lowered himself into the chair. Beckman raised a belligerent expression toward the front of the cafe, and for a moment his eyes slid to Johnny's. They looked at each other like two animals who met as natural enemies but, because of some mutual interest, observed a temporary pact and merely circled warily, keeping their distance.

Johnny could see that Roy noticed this gesture between the two men and knew he would automatically file it away in the back of his mind, not requiring for now that it be significant. Roy knew what he was doing. Johnny was sure that Roy was going to figure out who killed Sanchez. Even if he tried to keep him from it, Roy was going to figure out.

The thought amazed Johnny. That he and Roy would one day be pitted against each other had never occurred to him be-

fore. He bitterly regretted the circumstances that made such a contest necessary.

"I'll never understand why you want to live around here, Johnny. Right in the middle of people like him." Roy looked over his shoulder at the painter Beckman, who was slouched in his chair.

After he retired, Johnny had tried a nice, modern apartment in one of those suburban "apartment cities" with pools and tennis courts and a sauna. But he was used to living in the middle of things, not on the tame outer edge. So, after six months, he moved back to the city, into a three story building teeming with noisy life. He had seen enough of the seamy side of life not to be bothered by it, and he even enjoyed the periodic scandals as told by Mrs. Gold across the hall. Every morning he ate breakfast at Molly's, next door to his building, and just about every evening he ate dinner in the Italian place on the other side of the park.

All around the park were monstrous old homes, long ago turned into apartments when the well-to-do moved to the suburbs. So when the weather turned warm, the park filled with people, and the people filled Johnny's hours. And writing—something he'd always wanted to do when he never had

the time. Often, he wrote.

But Roy wouldn't appreciate this explanation. He wasn't a people man. He was the calculator, the logician, despite his personable manner. Maybe that's why the two of them had worked so well together. They balanced each other out. The human side of a crime had been Johnny's bailiwick—those little characteristics of human personality and prejudice that were almost second nature to him—and his insight had helped them solve several cases. Roy had been in awe of what he called Johnny's seventh sense. But Johnny knew Roy did better than okay for himself. A lot better. That's how he knew it was only a matter of time.

"Molly! Got me some breakfast?" Roy called.

"Keep your boots on!" Molly hollered. Roy turned back to Johnny.

"So what is it, Johnny? What's the secret? What makes this neighborhood so special?" It seemed funny that Roy should harp on this today. Was he leading up to something or avoiding something else?

"Aw, saves money so I can go see my grandkids out west. Retirement pay doesn't go far, you know."

"Hmmm." Roy didn't pursue it because Molly brought his breakfast. "'Bout time," he muttered, but rough, fat Molly

didn't take offense. They had some kind of understanding, Roy and Molly. He was consistently rude and so was she, but they liked each other.

Johnny looked over at Beckman again. He couldn't help it. He was beginning to agonize over the uncertainty of his situation. Right now, the future of his life depended on Beckman.

Once again Roy appeared to take note. He's already on the trail, thought Johnny. He's making mental notes. Maybe he already knows.

"You just need to be around people," Roy said. "Like that little Sanchez girl."

"Maria."

"Yeah."

Johnny often talked about Maria. For some reason he and the seven-year-old had hit it off from the beginning, both being alone for all practical purposes. His family was out west, and hers was simply not interested. In time she took the place of the granddaughter he rarely saw, and he taught her how to fly a kite and fold his special paper glider. Other children hung around, too, but Maria was his favorite.

She never really *told* him about Sanchez, her stepfather. In fact when Johnny began to suspect abuse, he questioned her outright, with no results. She simply wouldn't talk about



it. Eve, the mother, was mum. He thought she was probably afraid, too. Later, he and others were sure there was foul play, but Sanchez was clever. There was never the kind of evidence the law requires, though he and Roy had tried to get enough together for a report that would prove effective.

He knew better than to get involved when the situation was just about hopeless; at least he *should* have known better. And it was clear that there was little he could do to change her life at home. But he was already involved, and to see Maria mistreated, like so many he'd seen before, frustrated him more than he had thought possible. Roy finally gave up warning him not to get emotionally involved. But they both knew they could probably never really help Maria.

"Guess you heard about Sanchez." Roy finally got to the point. Johnny waited to meet his eyes directly, but Roy didn't look up.

"Yes. Too bad," Johnny answered. "You handling it?"

"Yep. I'm familiar with the territory, you might say." But Roy didn't seem to mean anything by that. Johnny thought he might be lying low. It wasn't like Roy, though, to play cat and mouse. Maybe it was too early yet. He probably just didn't know.

All night Johnny had tried to face reality, but he felt like a dog chasing his tail. With every hour that passed, the load of guilt increased. How could he explain it to his kids? How could such a thing be explained to anyone?

Johnny considered turning himself in. If in years past he had ever pictured himself murdering anyone, he thought he absolutely would have turned himself in. But in truth, he hadn't pictured any of it. He was a cop. He didn't kill people. He knew he should confess, and would sooner or later, but he couldn't decide to finally do it. He couldn't decide to do anything at all.

So now he waited for Roy to make the first move and hoped he would know what to do after that. It was all up to Roy. And up to Beckman. Because the painter Beckman was the only person who could implicate him in the murder.

"Any suspects?" Johnny asked Roy.

"Several possibilities," Roy said around his mouthful of toast. "Man like that doesn't have many friends. A lot of people owed him money."

"What about Maria?"

"Wasn't around at the time. Or her mother, either. They're both staying with Maria's aunt for now. The mother works at an all night bar on Morrow

Street. You already know about that. She was working at the time of the murder."

Roy's mention of the mother's work brought to mind such vivid recollections, he never even heard Roy's last sentence. Johnny had seen Mrs. Sanchez leaving for work late in the evening several different times with little Maria clinging pitifully to her, begging not to be left. The child should have been in bed by then anyway, he remembered thinking. It was almost nine o'clock when the mother left for work. The worst of it was that the girl was left alone with Sanchez.

He sat and watched Roy shovel in his sausage.

"You aren't eating much this morning," Roy said and Johnny suddenly realized he had eaten very little since Roy sat down. Roy looked at him strangely now. At least it seemed so to Johnny. But he couldn't trust his judgment. He might be getting paranoid. He thought of how criminals get paranoid and make mistakes. But then it didn't matter much because he would probably turn himself in soon.

"You're eating enough for both of us this morning, Roy!" He tried to laugh a little and make things seem normal. "Have time for a little game of Warships? If I remember right, I was winning yesterday." He

made a show of searching through his pockets for yesterday's game paper. Months ago they had fallen into the habit of playing Warships after breakfast. They kept records of shots and locations on pages from Roy's notepad. Since there was seldom time during a single meeting to complete an entire game, each kept his own sheet after that day's play, and they continued the following day.

"Don't think so today. Got an early appointment," Roy said.

"Just as well," Johnny said. "I can't find my paper anyway."

"First time I ever knew you to lose your game sheet when you were winning," Roy said quietly, and there was a dead serious look behind it. Or maybe Johnny just imagined that.

"I came up to see you last night after checking in on the investigation. You weren't home."

"No," Johnny answered carefully. "I took a walk." His friend was obviously fishing for an alibi. "A long walk. I left much earlier."

"Oh?"

"Around seven, I think."

"There must have been a lot of people out at that time. A good time to take a walk?"

"Usually are. But as it happened, with it being wet and all, I don't think I saw anyone I knew." So much for an alibi.

Roy nodded slowly while Johnny tried to look as if it was all light conversation. But he could see the other man's expression was doubtful. Or maybe he just thought so.

"You ever been in the Sanchez apartment, Johnny?"

Johnny paused before answering. He even considered spilling it all right then. But something kept him from it. "I do like to live among all kinds of people, Roy. Makes life interesting. But I don't like to get that close to a man like Sanchez."

There was a silence during which Johnny got the feeling Roy wanted to say something, but didn't. "You take care now," was all he did say as he threw his wadded napkin onto the plate and rose.

"How did he do it?—kill Sanchez?" Johnny couldn't help asking. He had to hear Roy's assessment.

"Bashed-in skull," Roy answered over his shoulder as he walked out the door.

Johnny saw Beckman across the small room. He had heard Roy's last remark and wore a knowing sneer on his face. Johnny could only guess what the nasty grin meant, but that evening his worst suspicions were confirmed.

The rain had started again in the afternoon, coming in a steady oppressive drizzle that

kept everything just soggy. It showed no sign of stopping, but except for the effect it had on his nerves, Johnny hardly noticed. He had taken another long walk after dinner, since he expected to have trouble sleeping again.

When he returned to his building, Beckman lounged on the broad cement porch steps. He was smoking, and even by the dim porch lamp, Johnny could see the splatters of green and yellow covering the dirty overalls. When Johnny approached, Beckman made no move to let him pass, but slowly took out a handkerchief to mop his face. Even the handkerchief was speckled with paint.

"What d'you want?" Johnny asked in a friendlier tone than he would have preferred to use. Like it or not he was going to have to keep on the right side of this man—at least until he figured out what to do.

Beckman was slow to answer, like someone who knew he had the upper hand and was in no great hurry. He simply watched Johnny and sucked his cigarette. Johnny's instincts told him that here was real trouble. He made as if to go around Beckman.

"Don't feel like talking?" Beckman snarled. He stood up in front of Johnny. "You and me got something in common now, don't we? A little secret." There

was the sneer again. Johnny guessed it was the closest Beckman ever came to smiling.

A low, flat-topped cement wall bordered each side of the porch, and at the end of each wall, facing the street, sat a cheaply molded six inch cement lion's head. Beckman bent over now and carelessly grasped one of the small, heavy heads in his right fist, brandishing its four-cornered base like a dangerous toy. Then he slapped the piece down dramatically into his left hand.

"Bashing in people's skulls, eh? You don't look like the type to go in for that kind of thing," he baited.

Johnny shuddered. It was worse than he thought. Not only had Beckman seen him come out of the apartment, he must have actually witnessed the whole thing. And he used the same words Roy had used. "Bashed-in skull." That wasn't the way it happened at all.

He had gone over it in his head so many times it was like a film that reran itself at will. He had heard Maria's scream just as he came in from dinner in the early evening. Then she burst from the first floor Sanchez apartment and ran past him onto the street. He understood the situation right away, and a decision clicked through his brain that this time he was going to do something about it.

He ran through the open door of the apartment just as Sanchez was heading out of it, belt in hand. When Johnny saw the belt, it made him even angrier. He had never been so angry. It was anger accumulated over the years of frustration at seeing abusive bullies like Sanchez staying just beyond the reach of the law. And now Maria. That was more than he could take.

Johnny was strong and heavy enough so that, surprising Sanchez the way he did, he easily knocked him to the floor. The back of Sanchez' head hit the corner of the raised brick hearth with a thud. It stunned him enough for Johnny to straddle his chest and get a good hold of hair by which he bounced the man's head off the hearth several times.

It hurt Sanchez. Johnny intended to hurt him. There must have been some blood, but not a lot. Sanchez hardly fought. He didn't seem to understand what was happening. He had started out chasing a little girl and ended up with a mad bear on his chest. But as for bashing in skulls and killing, Johnny had not intended anything like that.

The whole thing lasted only minutes, and by the time he cooled off enough to stop himself, Sanchez was in no frame of mind to retaliate. But he was

not dead. Johnny expected Sanchez got himself into plenty of scrapes and was used to fighting. It was a way of life for people like him.

Now, looking back, he realized how stupid he had been to dismiss the whole thing so simply. A head injury was a tricky subject, and this one had turned him into a criminal. At the time, however, he left the apartment without looking back, forcing himself to leave before he did any real damage.

It was then that he noticed the door was still ajar, had been open all the time. And outside stood Beckman. Johnny knew now that he had seen the whole thing.

The hall was empty otherwise, and Johnny had pushed past Beckman. He had met Mrs. Sanchez coming in with groceries, but she was too preoccupied with her own thoughts even to notice him.

It was hours later that same evening, after his walk, when Johnny learned from Mrs. Gold that Sanchez was dead and he had actually killed him. She knew most of the story, and as soon as he came in, she told it to him. He was horrified to hear that the injury he inflicted was fatal. He had left Sanchez stunned, but surely not dead. When the late news confirmed the old woman's tale, however, there was no alternative but to

believe it—he had committed murder.

"Well," Beckman went on in his sardonic tone, bringing Johnny back to his current dilemma. He still swung the lion's head at the end of one arm. "That makes us friends in a way, doesn't it?"

"What are you getting at?" Johnny snapped. He thought he knew where this was headed.

Beckman shrugged. "Workin' man like me, money comes hard. Might need a small, uh, loan now and then." Johnny scowled. "Oh, don't worry," Beckman said. "Your secret's safe with me. Just a loan between friends."

"What gives you the idea I have any money for blackmail?" He took a threatening step toward the man. Was he going to let himself be blackmailed? Could he let it go that far?

"Surely you can come up with something. Something you put away for *security* in your old age?" Johnny wondered why Beckman didn't seem worried about being alone with him, considering what he'd witnessed. Maybe that was why he still held the lion's head so conspicuously.

"I'll give you a little time to think it over. I'm sure you'll come around to my way of thinking. Tomorrow at Molly's. Noon." He started up the steps

and carefully replaced the head. "Noon," he said again.

Johnny was aware of the dripping sound of water sliding off the leaves of a tree that grew from a square of dirt in the sidewalk. Trash had accumulated around the base of the tree and was damp and mud-spotted. His head ached. He decided to find Roy right then and tell him the whole story. What a relief it would be to have it done.

But he didn't go. After another sleepless night he sat with Roy at Molly's for breakfast. This time he had the presence of mind to pretend he had a normal appetite. It was Roy who wasn't hungry. He didn't even bother to order.

"Case going badly?" Johnny asked him warily.

"Very badly, Johnny. Just hoping to find something more today, is all." He looked at Johnny with tired, red eyes. He hadn't had much sleep, either. He shifted in his chair and groaned. It wasn't like Roy to let a case get him down like that, and Johnny thought there could be only one good explanation why this one had. Roy knew and it was getting to him.

"Roy," he said finally with resignation. "I've got to talk to you about Sanchez—"

"No," Roy interrupted firmly. Johnny lapsed into surprised silence. Could it be that Roy

was trying to protect him and wouldn't *let* him confess?

"Roy," he repeated slowly, stressing each word, "I need to tell you about Sanchez."

"Listen," Roy's words came quickly now. "You're right. I've got a real problem on this one. What do you say you put your two cents in—like old times? Not now, though," he added hurriedly. "I need more time. Tonight. At the Sanchez place. Mrs. Sanchez and Maria are still at her sister's. They gave me a key. Say about nine?" With that, he got up so clumsily he almost knocked over his chair. "Gotta go."

Johnny watched Roy out the door in utter bewilderment. The situation was perfectly clear to him and yet defied all logic. He had killed Sanchez, and Roy, being the good detective he was, had discovered that fact. But apparently he refused to accept it and was willing to become a partner in crime with Johnny through some sort of coverup.

At this time when he needed a friend badly, Roy's loyalty touched Johnny more than he cared to admit. But not for a moment did he consider allowing Roy's sacrifice in his behalf. Now, finally, he was certain of what he had to do. But first he would see Roy that night. He couldn't think what difference it would make, but he'd wait

that long since it seemed to mean so much to Roy.

"Your friend stand you up today?" Johnny was startled by Beckman's voice behind him in the cafe. He felt Beckman's stale breath on his neck as he bent close and whispered, "Cops don't like killers, you know."

Johnny pushed his feet against the floor and slammed his chair back hard into the man's legs, knocking him off balance. Molly shot a look over at them from the counter, and people in booths stopped talking. Johnny jumped up from the chair. He wanted to smash into Beckman, but his anger was soon frustrated by the man's pitiful state.

He was recovering his balance with difficulty and still lay half sprawled across a nearby table. After righting himself, he mopped his face with the stained handkerchief. Johnny hovered over the sick man uncertainly, still needing to find a way to deny the insinuation that he now had more in common with a man of Beckman's ilk than with his friend Roy.

There was no denying that things were incredibly different now. With grim determination, he tried again to resign himself to the facts. Nothing in his past applied any more. He would almost surely find himself behind bars in less than twenty-four hours.

"Get up, you crummy junkie!" he growled at Beckman. He jerked the skinny man up by the painted overalls. "I ought to kick you like the dog you are, but I won't waste my time. Don't get near me again. Understand? Not at noon—not anytime!"

A threatening glow darkened Beckman's eye before he turned to go. Although he couldn't imagine the painter actually going to the police, Johnny knew he had burned his bridges.

Aware of the staring faces around him, Johnny tossed a bill on the table and headed for the door. Molly caught up with him there, stopping him with a fat, dimpled hand on his forearm. He realized he'd never heard her say more than a few words at a time before, and those had been more or less belated. The other people were starting to talk again, now that they could see nothing else was going to happen. They were used to disturbances like this.

"You're smart to stay away from that one!" Molly said to him in a low voice. She was talking about Beckman. "Go to the cops—anything—if he bothers you. He'll con you into giving him money like he did my brother. And he won't pay. Owes everywhere. Lost his job a few days ago, too. Don't waste any time keeping away from that one if you're smart!" Having



said her mouthful, Molly gave him a pat and waddled off in her hot-pink polyester uniform to take another order.

Johnny thought it was ironic that Molly wanted to protect him from bad guys. What will she say when she reads the paper tomorrow? he wondered.

He spent the rest of the day waiting for nine o'clock. He passed hours in the park, but couldn't take much interest in the people there. Maria hadn't been around since the death of her stepfather, and he missed her and the other children. There was one thought that eased his mind through everything: little brown-eyed Maria would not be bothered again by Sanchez. Maybe it was all worth it for that.

When the streetlamps went on at eight forty-five, Johnny shuffled across the street to his building. His head ached. It seemed as if it had been aching for days now. He dreaded the confrontation with Roy, but he would be relieved to have it all said. Past the cement lion guards and into the hall, Johnny paused outside the Sanchez place. The door was slightly open, and light came from inside.

"Johnny?" It was Roy's voice. He had heard Johnny's step.

"Yes." As he went in, he saw that the only light in the room came through a yellowed shade

over a lamp on the mantel. Roy sat at one end of a lumpy, worn couch, smoking a cigarette.

"Thought you quit," Johnny said.

"Did. And I will again right after all this is cleared up," he answered. Johnny could tell how upset he was.

Johnny's eyes involuntarily moved to the hearth, but he could see no sign. He almost expected to see a pool of blood, as though there was proof of his guilt everywhere.

"Sit down, Johnny," Roy said. "I need your help on this one. You always did have a good angle."

"Roy—"

"See, here's how it is." Roy bent forward earnestly, resting his forearms on his knees. "There's a suspect with motive, no real alibi, even a witness who saw him leaving the apartment. We haven't found the murder weapon yet, but everything points his way, you see."

So Beckman had talked. It surprised Johnny a little, somehow. The thought of Beckman's cooperating with the police, even out of revenge, had seemed unlikely to him. He couldn't see what would be gained by doing it.

Roy leaned back, took a long breath of cigarette, and exhaled it deliberately across the room. "There's just one thing," he went on. "I don't believe he did

it. It just doesn't sit right. Just doesn't make any sense . . ."

Johnny half smiled in spite of himself. "That doesn't sound like you, Roy."

"Nope. Sounds more like you, Johnny. Must have taught me something."

"Why is it you haven't arrested this guy; with evidence like that?" It was strange that they both refused to admit that the suspect was Johnny himself. He wondered how long they could go on skirting this all-important fact.

"I wanted to talk to you first. Thought you might be able to help me out. I was hoping to learn something new today. Something that would change things, but—nothing." Roy leaned toward Johnny again.

"The damage to the skull indicates a violent blow by a pretty heavy object. Mrs. Sanchez finds nothing missing here, and there's no clue that anything in the apartment was used. That means the man brought something here with him, probably *intending* to kill Sanchez." Johnny was confused.

Roy continued. "Do you see what I'm getting at? Premeditated murder is definitely out of my suspect's league."

Johnny stared into the fake fireplace. Evidently Roy was so determined to exonerate him that he had put together some crazy story by which he could

rationalize Johnny's innocence.

Suddenly Roy got up and strode over to a spot in front of a stuffed armchair which at one time had matched the sofa. "Now, the body was discovered here." He indicated an area with his arms.

Johnny frowned. He supposed it was possible that Sanchez had moved before dying. Still he shook his head.

"The sister-in-law found the body slumped here—in front of this chair. She said Maria had fled to *her* place after Sanchez threatened to beat the girl, and she came to get some of Maria's things, planning to keep Maria with her for a while. She thought the stepfather would be out when she came." Johnny shook his head.

"Look. Here." Roy pointed. "Bloodstains."

Johnny checked the hearth more closely now, sure he would find something. But there were no stains there and none between the hearth and where Roy stood. Right in front of Roy, though, was a large unmistakable bloodstain. Johnny's mind flooded with questions. It seemed that someone was playing a bad joke on him. *He* knew what had happened. He was there. *He did it.*

"The sister-in-law found the body?" he suddenly questioned Roy. "I thought Mrs. Sanchez . . ."

"Mrs. Sanchez? Mrs. Sanchez was at work. I didn't think you heard me when I told you that before. She got to work at five past nine that evening. The body was discovered about nine forty-five. Time of death placed at about nine fifteen." Roy recited the stats mechanically.

"Nine fifteen? But I saw Mrs. Sanchez coming in with groceries right after I... It's all wrong. Everything's wrong." It must be Roy, he thought, screwing things up so he'd confess. But he was ready to confess on his own.

"Sit down, Johnny. We've got to figure this out." Roy spoke as he would to a child, almost pleading. "Mrs. Sanchez says she came in from shopping about seven o'clock. She didn't remember seeing anyone in the hall, but she was late and she was worried her husband would be angry. She found him when she got here. Lying on the floor, disoriented from a very recent attack of some sort, but he was all right. He wouldn't say much about what happened except to swear he'd get even. Due to the nature of her husband's business dealings, Mrs. Sanchez didn't consider the event particularly unusual.

"He was normal by the time she left for work around nine. She believes the same person must have returned after she left, and finished the job."

Johnny sank onto the sofa. The words seeped through him. I didn't do it! he thought jubilantly. I didn't kill anyone! He could have danced a jig. Suddenly he started to laugh. And laugh. Roy watched him as if he'd gone over the edge. He was giddy with relief, and it was only with real effort that he was finally able to stop laughing.

Roy brightened some himself at Johnny's uproar, in spite of the crazy behavior. "I asked you here to help me explain a few things. If you've cracked the case, would you mind letting me in on it?"

"Okay, okay. What time did this witness say he saw—the suspect—leave the apartment?"

"He wasn't sure. Around nine thirty, he said."

The muddy waters were clearing fast now. "Okay. Get the boys to check the body again. Especially the area around and in the wound."

"What for?"

"Paint."

"Paint?"

"Tiny flecks of green and yellow paint."

"Beckman?"

Johnny nodded. "It had to be. He was in the hall and he watched the first man and Sanchez fight in here. He was slick enough to see that he could set the first guy up to take the rap, leaving him free to move in and get rid of Sanchez himself. He

saw the man leave all right, not at nine thirty but more than two hours earlier. The other man was there around seven." He still called himself "the other man," even when it didn't matter any more.

"Knowing that Mrs. Sanchez would leave for work later, he chose his weapon, waited until she left, and did his deed. I bet if you check around, you'll find that Beckman owed Sanchez a lot of money. Sanchez was known to be a nasty businessman. He had probably even threatened Beckman. And Molly said he lost his job that day, too. There's your motive. And as for the weapon . . ."

Johnny disappeared and in minutes returned with an object cradled carefully in his arms. Roy was already on the phone about the paint. "What's that?" he demanded when he'd hung up.

"Your murder weapon." Johnny lowered the bundle onto the sofa as if it were a baby. It was the cement lion that Beckman had brandished out front. "It's been rained on some, but the bottom of the base is rough and pitted. There are liable to be bits of skin and hair or blood left in it from when Beckman hit Sanchez."

Roy grinned. "You're pretty proud of yourself, aren't you?"

"You bet." Johnny grinned, too.

Roy gestured over his shoulder toward the phone. "They were working on something else, but they said they'd go ahead and check about the paint. One of them owes me a favor anyway." Roy shook his head. "I don't know, though. It'll be a stroke of luck if they find anything."

"Have you ever really looked at Beckman? For the past week, since he started that job, he's worn green and yellow paint all over him. I don't think he ever takes a bath. It's on his clothes, in his hair, on his handkerchief. It even washes off him when it rains."

"Now, in order to get this thing in here without being noticed, he'd have to hide it somehow. Maybe fold his overalls over it, hug it to him. In the process, little chips of old dry paint would crack off onto it. Some of the paint blobs he wore around on him would take a while to dry, too. It's even possible that some from that day's work was still wet enough to rub off onto the base somewhere. Maybe not so we could see it, but so it could be detected in the lab."

"I hope you're right. What do you say we take this in." He pointed at the lion.

"Right. Better take the other one, too, just in case. But I have a feeling this is the one." He remembered the way Beckman

had handled that particular cast the day before.

"So how's your book coming, Johnny?" Roy asked while they waited at the station.

"What makes you think I'm writing a book?"

"You don't know someone this long and not know what's inside him." Their eyes met and held. "And what's not."

"I don't think I ever before gave you enough credit in the sensitivity department."

"Which case you writing up?"

Johnny looked sheepish. "Actually, Roy, it's a children's story. About a dinosaur."

"A children's story! With all that police work—the experiences you could tell—and you write a children's story about dinosaurs?" This time Roy roared.

When the preliminary reports finally came back, they showed that Johnny was right about the paint. They had found traces of it in the wound and on one of the lions, too. They also found tissue from a man's body which they were trying to match to Sanchez. There was enough to bring Beckman in.

"Oh, Johnny." Roy stopped him as they walked out onto the dark street. "I have something that belongs to you." He pulled a neatly folded piece of paper from his breast pocket.

Johnny recognized it by

streetlight as his Warships game sheet for the last time he and Roy played—the day of the murder.

"Where'd you find it?"

"The Sanchez place. On the hearth. It was lying there when we first went to investigate." Johnny looked at it. Only Roy could ever have connected it to him. He wondered silently whether his friend would have used it against him. He thought he knew that answer.

"And here's a little memento for you. Something to show your grandchildren." Roy thrust the second item at him. Johnny recognized it immediately, and his hands shook as he scanned its contents. It was a warrant for his arrest.

"You came that close?"

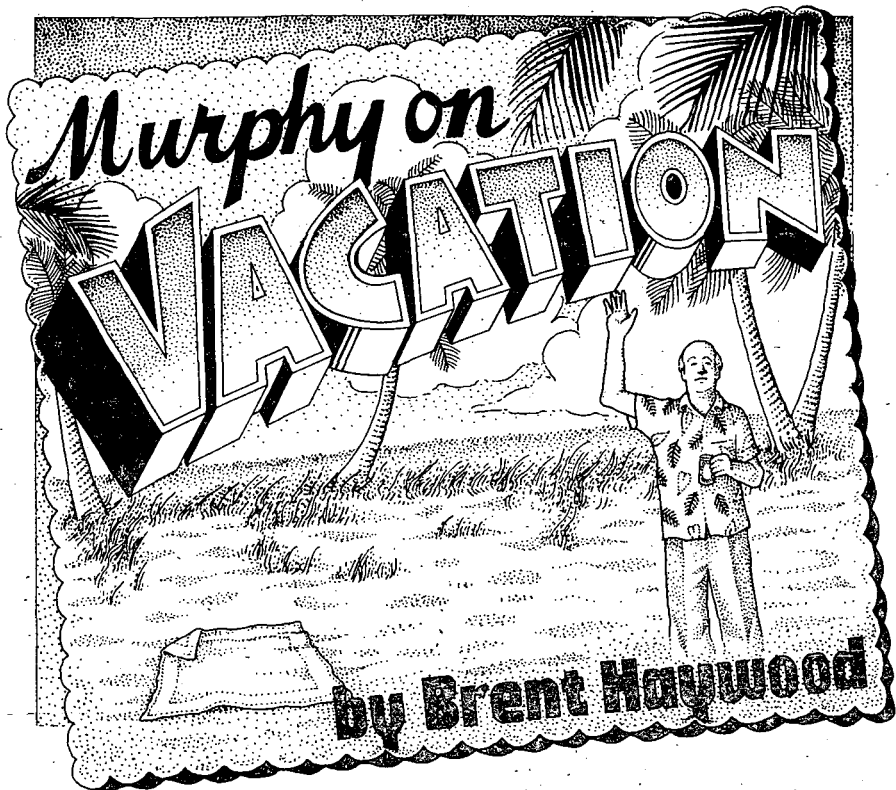
"That close," Roy said softly. "And I've never been so damned glad to see you solve a case!"

Johnny held up the game sheet and let it flutter in the breeze. "So this was your evidence. This and Beckman's statement. Not a bad start."

Roy nodded. "Thought you'd like to have it back." He smiled and there was no tension now. "You were ahead. Finish the game tomorrow?"

Johnny noticed how the stars stood out against the black sky and wondered when the rain had stopped.

"Yeah. Tomorrow."



**I**t probably didn't mean much, but it was odd. They were in a small open field near the airport—partly scrub grass and partly that sandy red dirt you see all through northern Florida. She was spread out on a cheap plastic chaise longue next to the car, sunning in an ugly black swimsuit. She wasn't young or thin or pretty, and she didn't look as if she ever had been. He was standing next to her, in shirtsleeves, looking as

*Illustration by Glenn Wolff*

if he was her husband and had been for a while. He leaned back against the car and seemed to be looking off toward the main runway. A couple of times he put binoculars against his face. There was nothing on the runway or in the air above it. I watched them for a minute—more or less trying to figure out what they were doing—and then I drove on.

I was on vacation. I felt like I deserved one. Not because I'd

been working hard or accomplishing things—just because. An old police buddy of mine had a family and a house on the beach. They were someplace else, so I was using the house. Caretaker. It's a funny word when you think about it. I suppose I was trying, in my usual ineffective way, to take care of myself.

And I guess I was doing all right; for an old retired guy. My pension kept me in beer, and for a few weeks I was out of the New Orleans heat. Florida is far from cool, but heat is easier to take on a white sand beach next to the Gulf of Mexico.

So I drove on to the Winn Dixie, bought myself some beer and a couple of steaks, and it was late afternoon when I got back to the beach house. I opened a beer and decided to take a walk. Sometimes I walk down to the pier where all the kids are. They've got picnic tables down there that nobody uses except old retired guys like me. We play chess. Some of the guys ain't bad, I guess, but I didn't feel like chess so I put a second beer in my hip pocket and walked the other way, where there aren't so many people. Anyone who saw me probably thought I was an old drunk, but to hell with them. I was on vacation, and I was going for a walk.

I walk slow but I drink slow,

too. Maybe I'd gone half a mile by the time I'd finished that first one. The afternoon was about to turn into evening and the vacation types had packed their kids and their sunburns into their station wagons and headed home. The beach was deserted.

I crumpled the empty can and put it in a front pocket. The warm one in my hip pocket could wait until I started back. I bent over to roll up my pants—I felt like getting my feet wet—and a voice startled me so much that I nearly wrenched my back trying to straighten up. It was a girl's voice:

"Those sharks out there?"

"Huh?"

"Out there—look!"

I looked. "No, those ain't sharks. They're dolphins. Look at how they swim." She looked at them and I looked at her. She was cute, appealing in a kind of mischievous way, with short dark hair, a black two-piece swimsuit, and too much jewelry for the beach. She wasn't loaded with diamonds or anything—nothing real pricy—she was just wearing more than enough. It looked a little funny. But what do I know about what kids wear to the beach?

"You sure they're not sharks? They *look* like sharks."

"Sharks swim different. They don't roll through the water like that. They're just dumb



fish. Dolphins have fun, see? They kinda dive around and play. . . ."

It was beautiful to see. There were maybe twenty of them, moving along the beach just beyond the breakers, rolling their fins in the air in groups of two or three. You could even pick out one old guy, his fin bigger than all the others and kinda chewed up, like he'd been through more than the rest and maybe knew something. They were mysterious and peaceful, and watching them made me feel good. And maybe it sounds crazy, but for a second I completely forgot the girl was there. I pulled the can of beer out of my hip pocket and opened it while I watched.

"Well—if you're sure they're not sharks, I guess I'll go for a swim."

"Huh? Oh, right. Yeah, they won't bother you. . . ."

"Well—take it easy."

"Right. You too."

The girl waded through the foam and then dived in. She was a good swimmer, but I couldn't help thinking she looked a little clumsy after the dolphins. She rolled onto her back and waved. I waved, too, and started back down the beach, sipping on my warm beer and letting water wash around my feet. The dolphins were moving in the same direction, but they got farther and

farther ahead of me. By the time I got back to the beach house, I couldn't see them any more. I sat on the porch until the mosquitoes got bad, and then went inside to cook a steak.

Maybe I dreamt about dolphins that night—I really couldn't tell you—but I woke up wanting to take a swim. It was real early, just a little past dawn, and I had the whole Gulf to myself. The water was still warmer than the air, the way it is at night. I splashed around some and felt good and refreshed when I got out. I decided a walk would be a good way to dry off. I'm not some kinda exercise nut or anything—I just felt like walking. Half a mile down the beach I saw her ice chest.

I hadn't noticed it the evening before, but I was sure it was hers. A towel was spread out next to it, and when I walked over there, I saw that her jewelry was spread out on the towel. A wristwatch, a couple of neck chains, and a ring with a small diamond. There was a pair of sandals, too, and her purse. All sitting there as if she had just walked down to the water for a swim and would be right back. Only the stuff was covered with early morning mist. It had been there all night. I looked around, but I knew I wouldn't see her. It made me feel sick inside.

The road was just a couple of hundred yards on the other side of the dunes, but the soft sand was already getting warm in the morning sun and the walk seemed farther. I was out of breath when I got to her car.

It was one of those little compacts that all look the same nowadays. This one was a Dodge, lemon yellow, the kind of car a daddy buys for his daughter: cute but practical. On the front bumper was a dime-store license plate with a name on it—one of those flowered jobs girls are always putting on their cars. The name on it was Suzy.

Half a mile up the road there was a ranger station, so I walked that way. The hot asphalt didn't do my bare feet any good, and the sharp clamshell shoulder didn't feel any better.

The ranger was just opening his station, a little shack on the roadway where they collected a dollar a car in the daylight hours. There was a phone, and the ranger called the sheriff's office to report an "abandoned car." Then he made me a cup of coffee.

The deputy got there about the time my feet quit hurting. He was an earnest young guy, polite, the sort of rookie that sometimes grows into a good cop and sometimes quits and goes into a different line of work. I told him my story while

we drove back to the girl's car. We looked the Dodge over and then I told him the story again while we walked across the dunes to the girl's cooler.

"Yep—it sure looks like this has been here all night. See the dew still on it?"

"I see it," I said. I was out of breath for the third time that morning, and I'm a guy who can go years without doing things that get me out of breath.

He took a look up and down the beach and said, "Right now it looks like a drowning. I'll need to call it in and get some more information from you. Come with me, please." He started back toward the car.

"Ah—if you don't mind . . ."

He paused a minute and then he caught on. My heavy breathing was hard to miss. "Oh—right. If you'll just wait right here, Mr. Murphy, there's a couple of forms I need to fill out."

"I can't think of anything I'd rather do."

The kid trotted away, and I sat down in the sand and tried not to think about the days when I could do that. I guess I never did so much trotting through sand. In my days as a cop in Boston, we usually dealt with pavement. Scollay Square was a lot of things, but it was never sandy. I looked at the towel that Suzy—if that was her name—had left behind in

the sand and tried not to feel sad. Wind made the edge of the towel flip up and down.

The kid came back with a clipboard, and I went through the story one more time. When we were finished, he said, "That's pretty good, Mr. Murphy. People hardly ever tell a story more than once without changing something—remembering some new detail or forgetting something—even making something up, maybe without even realizing it. What kind of work did you do before you retired?"

"I was on the force in Boston. Detective. It's been a long time."

He smiled like he'd figured it all along. "Well, Mr. Murphy, thank you for your help. If you'd like to wait for the other car, we'll be able to give you a ride to your house."

"No, thanks," I said. "I think I've caught my breath." We said our goodbyes and I walked back. I sure didn't need any more exercise, but I really didn't feel like getting into a police car, either. I would've felt naked in just my swimsuit, and the cars they've got nowadays give me the creeps. Full of computers and riot gear, even in small Florida beach towns.

Back at the house I treated myself to an early beer and a nap. In the afternoon I wandered down to the pier and played a slow game of chess

with a guy whose name I can never think of. I don't remember who won, but I do remember that I couldn't get my mind off the girl. Partly I was just sad, but partly something was bothering me, something about the whole thing that didn't make sense. I decided it was just an old cop habit, thinking about things that weren't finished yet.

Only this was finished. In a couple of days the girl would wash up on the beach and spoil someone's vacation and that would be it. Horrible and tragic, but true. The whole thing made me feel bad.

That evening I pretended I wasn't anywhere near a beach. I turned on the TV and opened a beer. I caught the tail end of a Braves game, and then the local news came on.

It was a slow day in a small town. The lead story was about Suzy—that turned out to be her name. They had film of her towel and her cooler sitting on the beach, and they had a shot of her car, surrounded by sheriff's deputies and highway patrolmen. They were considering a "number of possibilities," one of which was that she might have been abducted. I'd thought of that, too, but it didn't seem likely—not with the purse and jewelry left behind. Even sickos need money.

Then they switched away from the beach and to a shot of Suzy's

house. She lived with her parents. The three of them had just moved south from Cleveland—they'd always dreamed of living on the beach. While the news guy said all this, they ran film of Mr. and Mrs. Chrichton in their living room, looking about the way you'd expect them to look.

At first I thought they looked familiar just because tragedy is such a universal thing: parents who lose a child always *look* the same, no matter who they are or where they're from. I was congratulating myself for having a deep thought when I realized that I'd actually *seen* Mr. and Mrs. Chrichton before. They were the couple I'd noticed over by the airport, watching airplanes that weren't there.

I guess you could say it gave me pause. I switched off the TV and got a beer out of the refrigerator. Then two things happened at once. The part of my brain that had made detective all those years ago came out of retirement, and the phone rang. I answered the phone but my thoughts were already back on the beach, telling a girl that dolphins weren't sharks, and watching her go for a swim. The voice on the line seemed far away, and it wasn't because of a bad connection.

"Hello, Mr. Murphy please? Hello?"

"Huh—right. This is Murphy."

"Hello, Mr. Murphy. This is Carter, from the sheriff's office? I spoke to you early this morning—on the beach?"

It was an odd way for a cop to talk—making everything into a question—but the kid was young. "Yeah, Carter, what can I do for you?"

"Well, Mr. Murphy, I'm not sure. I was wondering if I could take up some of your time this evening—maybe ask you a few questions. . . ."

"This about the Chrichton girl?"

"Yes, sir. Just a couple of things I'm trying to clear up."

"You on duty?"

"Why, no, sir. This is more or less on my own."

"Good. Bring some beer. I'll see you when you get here."

The kid made good time, but I expected that. He struck me as the punctual type. He brought a six-pack of beer but didn't drink one with me.

"Thought you were off duty," I said.

"Oh, I am, Mr. Murphy. I'm really not much of a drinker."

"Oh! Then I thank you for bringing this over—can I fix you a cup of coffee or something?"

"Well, actually, Mr. Murphy, my wife and I are in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints."

"I see, I see. Then how about a glass of orange juice? I hate to drink alone, Carter." That was a lie—if I'm gonna have a drink, I don't much care whether or not anyone is around to watch. I was just trying to make the youngster relax—he was clearly nervous and it was making *me* nervous. I was also trying to picture him buying beer at the Winn Dixie while he kept an eye out for fellow Mormons.

"Sure, Mr. Murphy, a glass of orange juice would be great. Thank you."

"No sweat, kid. And stop with that 'mister' stuff. Everyone just calls me Murphy."

I got him the orange juice, and we moved out onto the back deck. There was still plenty of light and a steady, cooling, on-shore-breeze. We made ourselves more or less comfortable, or at least I did. The kid didn't look like he was *ever* comfortable. "All right, Carter. What can I do for you?"

"Well, Mr. Murphy, this case—the missing Chrichton girl—looks pretty cut and dried, right? I mean, she most likely went for a swim and got a cramp or something. It's just that . . . well, I just wanted to make sure about a few things. I know you were a detective and everything, and it's not very likely, but is it possible that, since we talked this morning, you might have, maybe, *thought*

of something, maybe remembered something that you didn't think of this morning? I know it's not likely—I just wanted to check. . . ."

"How long you been doing this, Carter?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"How long you been a cop?"

"Well, actually, this is my first year. I've been a deputy here for just over nine months. . . . Why?"

"No offense, but it shows. I'll give you some free advice—and maybe it's only worth what you're paying for it, but I'll give it to you anyway. You gotta change your questioning technique. That bumbling, tentative, I'm-not-sure-but stuff only works for Colombo on TV. If you want a witness to remember something new, you gotta make him think in new ways. Most witnesses fall into a rut after they've told their story a couple of times. You wanna find out something new, you gotta jar 'em outa their rut. See what I mean?"

"I'm not sure . . ."

"Okay, let's start with why you're here. Sometime today, sometime after you talked to me this morning, you noticed something that makes you think this might be more than a simple drowning, right?"

"Well, sort of . . ."

"Okay, then, you need to lead me on a little. I'm just an old

man with a feeble memory. You gotta ask me questions that'll make me remember better, hopefully make me remember something that will either support or eliminate whatever ideas you came up with today, understand?"

"I see what you mean, Mr. Murphy, but I'm not sure it helps me. You see, I haven't really come up with anything solid. It's just a feeling I got today, when I talked to the girl's parents."

"Tell me."

"I wish I could. I mean, I'm not sure I understand it myself. It just didn't seem like they were grieving. They were unhappy looking and all. They just weren't *grieving*. I don't know how else to put it, Mr. Murphy."

"That's not a whole lot to go on. . . ."

"I know. There's one more thing. Near as I can find out, they never thought of their daughter as missing. They never called the city police, or even any of the girl's friends."

"That could mean something, but it doesn't have to. It was plenty early in the morning when I found her things. They may have gone to bed early and not noticed that the girl didn't come in that night."

"I thought of that, Mr. Murphy, but she wasn't home for dinner . . . and I can't find any-

one that she was planning to have dinner with. I can't even find any friends. The Chrigh-ton's haven't been living here long."

I drank a little beer and the kid ignored his orange juice. Something was falling into place here, but I was damned if I knew what.

Finally, I said, "Deputy, it looks to me like you might have something worth looking into. I don't know just what, but I *did* think of something I didn't tell you this morning. Thought of it, in fact, just before you called, while I was watching the news. I'm kinda embarrassed I didn't notice it before. After I spoke with the girl yesterday afternoon, she went for a swim. I watched her wade in and swim out through the surf. She wasn't a bad little swimmer. And she was wearing her jewelry. All of it."

Carter didn't say anything for a minute. Then he whistled. That struck me funny, and I laughed. He looked confused and said, "What's so funny, Mr. Murphy?"

"A guy I used to know—years and years ago. He was on the force with me in Boston. Mormon, just like you, and he whistled whenever one of the rest of us would have let out a 'Holy Jesus' or an 'I'll be damned.' It always struck me funny then, this good Mormon surrounded

by hard-drinking, thick-cursing Irishmen. He was a damn good cop.

"But listen, Carter, there's something else. The Chrigh-ton, the girl's parents. I saw them yesterday, before I met the girl."

"On the beach?"

"No, and you'll never guess where so I'll tell you. They were over by the airport, in that big field, the one you pass on the way to the supermarket. She was sunning herself in a chaise longue, and he was watching something through binoculars, God knows what. There was nothing in the sky."

Carter whistled again, louder, and then got all excited. "Mr. Murphy, a plane was stolen last night! The sheriff's office doesn't handle that sort of thing—it's federal—but we get notified. Maybe it doesn't mean anything, but..."

"Everything means *something*, kid. Maybe we oughta take a ride."

"The airport?"

"That's where I'd start."

"You'd come along, Mr. Murphy? I mean, well, you're being a real help..."

"Sure, kid. I'll take a ride."

"Good. Oh, shoot—can I use your phone? I need to call my wife. She worries."

So the kid called his wife and we took a ride over to the airport. On the way, the kid had

second thoughts: "Ah, Mr. Murphy, for a second there, back at your house, this was starting to make sense. But now, all of a sudden, it doesn't. I mean, just why are we going to the airport?"

"That's what you need to tell me, Carter. We got something here that may be important and may be just coincidence. It may be even less than that, but your job is to figure ways this mess *might* make sense, and then check for facts to back you up. A good cop checks out every lead."

"I guess you're right. . . ."

"Damn straight, I'm right. Why, in the old days, when I was on a case and there was something that didn't seem to fit, it would drive me crazy until I chased it down and either *made* it fit or got it off my mind. I remember one time there was a guy with a dachshund, you know, one of them wiener dogs? Well, we were trying to nail the guy for killing his wife. I was sure he'd done it, but all the evidence was circumstantial. The dog had belonged to the wife—had gone everywhere with her—anyway... aw, hell, Carter. You don't wanna hear these old war stories."

"Oh, no, Mr. Murphy, it sounds interesting. . . ."

"Eh—you're a polite kid. Hey, tell me, how does the county rate getting your services for



free? You did say you were off duty, didn't you?"

"There's an election coming up, Mr. Murphy. Overtime costs money. . . ."

"The sheriff know you're working on this thing?"

"Well . . . no, actually. You see, he pretty much figures the whole thing is the way it looks—I mean a drowning and all."

"I bet he likes things simple and straightforward, eh?"

"Especially in an election year. But he is a good sheriff, Mr. Murphy."

"And I bet he likes his liquor on Saturday night, and a red neck on all his deputies. And I bet it's sometimes hard for a man like you, a man with your beliefs, to fit in."

"Well—I guess sometimes it is a little trying—but I like my job, Mr. Murphy. Love it, really. I believe the Lord put each one of us on this earth for a reason."

"You're probably right about that, Carter. In fact, it's just what Sorenson used to say."

"Sorenson?"

"The guy I told you about. The guy who whistled."

That made Carter smile, and I felt another war story coming on, so I guess it was a good thing he turned into the airport parking lot when he did.

"Mr. Murphy, I still don't know what we're doing here. Who are we going to talk to?

What do we ask them?"

"For starters, we ask them about a stolen plane. After that, you're on your own."

In the main airport building there was a security guard who didn't know anything about the plane theft except that they "hadn't caught the guy yet." He'd been off the night before. Upstairs, in the weather station, we found the man who'd reported the theft. The plane belonged to a man he knew, and he'd recognized it when it taxied out under the big runway lights. Since the owner had never flown without a weather briefing before, the meteorologist got suspicious. The plane was in the air by the time the weatherman got its owner on the phone. It had been around nine o'clock—just a little after dark. The plane hadn't been recovered yet, but it probably wouldn't take long. Apparently the fuel on board didn't give it a range of more than a couple of hundred miles.

Carter managed to get all this information without any help from me, but he didn't seem real happy about things when we got back into his car.

"This hasn't got us anywhere, Mr. Murphy. We still only have a missing girl, a stolen plane, and two people who aren't grieving the way they should be."

"Two people who hang around

airports. You got a flashlight in this heap?"

"Sure, Mr. Murphy, a good one. Under the seat there."

"That's fine. Now take me to a field where I can watch airplanes."

We drove to where I'd first seen the Chrichtons and got out to look. There was a clean view of the airport about three hundred yards away, with rows of small planes clearly visible in the powerful mercury vapor lights. There were shadows, too—it would be relatively easy for a thief to move unseen from the field to one of the planes.

I switched on the flash and began searching the edge of the field that bordered the road. Carter walked along with me. "Tell me, kid," I said, "do the Chrichtons own a boat?"

"I didn't see one while I was over there, Mr. Murphy, but it could have been in the garage. The overhead door was down and a car was outside, in the driveway. Why?"

"Look at what we have. A girl takes off her jewelry to go for a swim and drowns. Or at least it looks that way, and maybe that's the way she wants it to look. She picks a spot on the beach where people will see her, and then waits for all the people to leave. Then she takes off her jewelry and *she* leaves. Someone needs to pick her up—she's not taking her

car—but the beach highway is busy, so she really *does* go swimming, and her accomplice picks her up in a boat. There must be a million boat ramps in this area.

"They trailer the boat and the girl changes out of her swimsuit in the car. As soon as it's dark, they drive here and liberate a plane."

"Are you saying this girl is a pilot?"

"Either her or an accomplice. Maybe there's a boyfriend we don't know about. Anyway, the plane is just another smoke-screen, like the jewelry and the abandoned car. The plane turns up in a small field a couple of hundred miles away. And while you guys are searching the beaches for her body, she's on a bus to anywhere, or maybe even on another plane. Gone without a trace, and assumed dead."

"But why?"

"Hell if I know. Maybe she had insurance."

The kid let out his whistle again. "But the whole thing is crazy, Mr. Murphy. Even if the parents collect the insurance, the girl has to hide out the rest of her life. What kind of life is that? It's *crazy!*"

"It's even crazier than that. Without a body, the insurance company doesn't have to pay for seven years. They *can* pay, and in a case like this—a young

girl, grieving parents—they probably would. It looks bad if they don't. But there's no guarantee. If anything looks at all fishy to them . . ."

"It's crazy, just crazy."

"Sure it is, Carter, but people do crazy things all the time. Hell, people speed in school zones. What's crazier than endangering little kids?"

"I guess you're right about that. But it's all so *wild*."

"Yeah, but it's the only thing I can think of that makes everything fit. Maybe you can come up with something better, but . . ."

"Murphy, look! Look there!"

The kid's young eyes picked it out first. Tire tracks in the soft red dirt, wide automobile tracks with odd ruts running through them, sometimes running down the center, sometimes swinging off to one side. That would be from the smaller trailer tires.

"You sure called that one, Mr. Murphy. You sure called that one. . . ."

"Maybe I did, and maybe not. This town is full of boat trailers, and we don't even know that the Chrichtons have a boat."

"That'll be easy enough to find out. I can check on that tomorrow. I guess I'll need to call Cleveland to find out if the girl had insurance."

"If she had it, you won't need to call. The investigator will

find you. And me, too, probably. You could call and see if the girl is a registered pilot, but that'll wait until morning. Chances are good they'll locate the plane tomorrow. That may clear up some things. In the meantime, this old retired cop needs some sleep."

"I sure thank you for your help, Mr. Murphy."

"Forget it, kid. It's been kinda fun. And don't get your hopes too high—we don't have anything solid yet. Just a crazy theory. And do me a favor—drop that 'mister' stuff, will ya?"

The kid drove me home, and I took a beer to bed with me. I fell asleep trying to picture a cute, dark-haired girl flying a hot airplane into a dark Florida sky. The kid had been right about one thing. It was crazy.

The phone call interrupted my late morning coffee. The kid was still calling me Mr. Murphy.

"Yeah, it's me," I said. "What's all that noise in the back-ground?"

"Oh—I'm calling from a pay phone. I didn't want to call from the station."

"Huh? What's going on?"

"They found the plane, Mr. Murphy. The girl was in it. She crashed, trying to land in a field over in Alabama. The fellows over at the airport say it would have been hard, even for a real good pilot. She was out of fuel,

and it was just an old grassy field—a swamp in the winter-time. There were no lights. She died of a concussion.”

This time I let out a soft whistle. “So what are you doing next, kid?”

“Well, Mr. Murphy, that’s what I’m calling you about. Like you said last night, we don’t really have any *hard* evidence. The way it looks—I mean to everyone but you and me—is that the girl was just kind of wild. You see?”

“Wild isn’t the word for it, but go ahead.”

“And Mr. and Mrs. Chrigh-ton *did* lose their only daughter. I mean, don’t you think they’ve been through enough? That money isn’t going to bring their daughter back.”

“No, it isn’t. And now that there’s a body, they’re almost sure to get the money. As long as you and I keep quiet.”

For a long moment, the only thing I could hear over the phone was a background of traffic noise. Then the kid said, “Mr. Murphy, I’ve been praying

for guidance on this—I mean, I just don’t feel right either way, but . . . I mean they *did* lose their only daughter. . . .”

“Look, kid, it doesn’t make any difference to me *how* you handle it. I haven’t been a cop for years, and I’m not gonna start again now. You do whatever you need to, all right?”

“All right, Mr. Murphy. Thank you. And thank you for your help last night. If it hadn’t been for your help, I never would have . . .”

“You’d never have had to make this decision. Don’t mention it. Come by and see me some time if you feel like it.”

The Chrichtons made the evening news for the second time in a row, and this time they really were grieving. It was pitiful. I was in Florida for a couple more weeks, but the kid never came to visit. It felt good to get back to my normal retirement routine in New Orleans—my vacation hadn’t exactly been restful. Sometimes I wonder what they did with the money.

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## SOLUTION TO THE JANUARY “UNSOLVED”:

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The clue was that the warden’s statement was literally true. At the rate of one number per second, it would take precisely one hundred years to reach the right combination. The prisoner calculated that there are 3155760000 seconds in a hundred years and found that it worked.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# NECK

by Roald Dahl

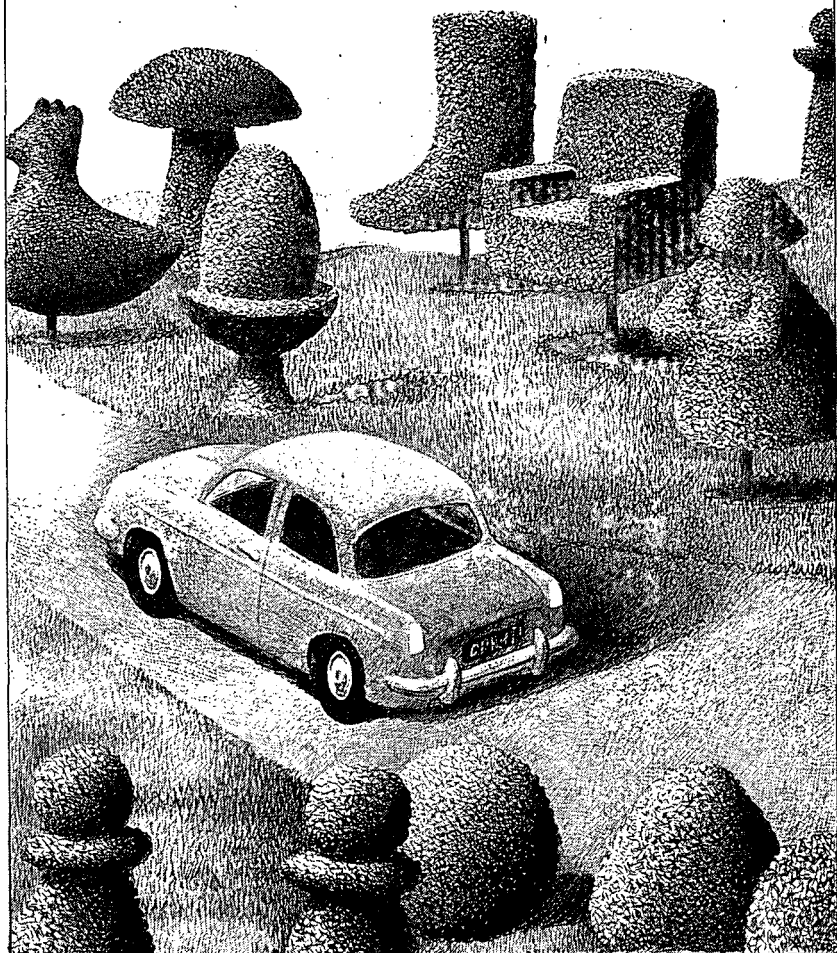


Illustration by Richard Crist

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When, about eight years ago, old Sir William Turton died and his son Basil inherited the Turton Press (as well as the title), I can remember how they started laying bets around Fleet Street as to just how long it would be before some nice young woman managed to persuade the little fellow that she must look after him. That is to say, him and his money.

The new Sir Basil Turton was maybe forty years old at the time, a bachelor, a man of mild and simple character who up to then had shown no interest in anything at all except his collection of modern paintings and sculpture. No woman had disturbed him; no scandal or gossip had ever touched his name. But now that he had become the proprietor of quite a large newspaper and magazine empire, it was necessary for him to emerge from the calm of his father's country house and come up to London.

Naturally, the vultures started gathering at once, and I believe that not only Fleet Street but very nearly the whole of the city was looking on eagerly as they scrambled for the body. It was slow motion, of course, deliberate and deadly slow motion, and therefore not so much like vultures as a bunch of agile crabs clawing for a piece of horsemeat under water.

But to everyone's surprise the little chap proved to be remarkably elusive, and the chase dragged on right through the spring and early summer of that year. I did not know Sir Basil personally, nor did I have any reason to feel friendly toward him, but I couldn't help taking the side of my own sex and found myself cheering loudly every time he managed to get himself off the hook.

Then, round about the beginning of August, apparently at some secret female signal, the girls declared a sort of truce among themselves while they went abroad, and rested, and regrouped, and made fresh plans for the winter kill. This was a mistake because precisely at that moment a dazzling creature called Natalia something or other, whom nobody had heard of before, swept in from the Continent, took Sir Basil firmly by the wrist, and led him off in a kind of swoon to the Registry Office at Caxton Hall where she married him before anyone else, least of all the bridegroom, realized what was happening.

You can imagine that the London ladies were indignant, and naturally they started disseminating a vast amount of fruity gossip about the new Lady Turton. ("That dirty poacher," they called her.) But we don't have to go into that. In fact, for the purposes of this story we can skip the next six years, which brings us right up to



the present, to an occasion exactly one week ago today when I myself had the pleasure of meeting her ladyship for the first time. By now, as you must have guessed, she was not only running the whole of the Turton Press, but as a result had become a considerable political force in the country. I realize that other women have done this sort of thing before, but what made her particular case unusual was the fact that she was a foreigner and that nobody seemed to know precisely what country she came from, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, or Russia.

So last Thursday I went to this small dinner party at a friend's in London, and while we were standing around in the drawing room before the meal, sipping good martinis and talking about the atom bomb and Mr. Bevan, the maid popped her head in to announce the last guest.

"Lady Turton," she said.

Nobody stopped talking; we were too well-mannered for that. No heads were turned. Only our eyes swung round to the door, waiting for the entrance.

She came in fast—tall and slim in a red-gold dress with sparkles on it—the mouth smiling, the hand outstretched toward her hostess, and my heavens, I must say she was a beauty.

"Mildred, good evening!"

"My dear Lady Turton! How nice!"

I believe we *did* stop talking then, and we turned and stared and stood waiting quite meekly to be introduced, just like she might have been the queen or a famous filmstar. But she was better looking than either of those. The hair was black, and to go with it she had one of those pale, oval, innocent fifteenth century Flemish faces, almost exactly a madonna by Memling or Van Eyck. At least that was the first impression. Later, when my turn came to shake hands, I got a closer look and saw that except for the outline and coloring it wasn't really a madonna at all—far, far from it.

The nostrils, for example, were very odd, somehow more open, more flaring than any I had seen before, and excessively arched. This gave the whole nose a kind of open, snorting look that had something of the wild animal about it—the mustang.

And the eyes, when I saw them close, were not wide and round the way the madonna painters used to make them, but long and half closed, half smiling, half sullen, and slightly vulgar, so that in one way and another they gave her a most delicately dissipated air. What's more, they didn't look at you directly. They came to



you slowly from over on one side with a curious sliding motion that made me nervous. I tried to see their color, thought it was pale grey, but couldn't be sure.

Then she was led away across the room to meet other people. I stood watching her. She was clearly conscious of her success and of the way these Londoners were deferring to her. "Here am I," she seemed to be saying, "and I only came over a few years ago, but already I am richer and more powerful than any of you." There was a little prance of triumph in her walk.

A few minutes later we went in to dinner, and to my surprise I found myself seated on her ladyship's right. I presumed that our hostess had done this as a kindness to me, thinking I might pick up some material for the social column I write each day in the evening paper, and I settled myself down ready for an interesting meal. But the famous lady took no notice of me at all; she spent her time talking to the man on her left, the host. Until at last, just as I was finishing my ice cream, she suddenly turned, reached over, picked up my place card, and read the name. Then, with that queer sliding motion of the eyes, she looked into my face. I smiled and made a little bow. She didn't smile back, but started shooting questions at me, rather personal questions—job, age, family, things like that—in a peculiar lapping voice, and I found myself answering as best I could.

During this inquisition it came out among other things that I was a lover of painting and sculpture.

"Then you should come down to the country some time and see my husband's collection." She said it casually, merely as a form of conversation, but you must realize that in my job I cannot afford to lose an opportunity like this.

"How kind of you, Lady Turton. But I'd simply love to. When shall I come?"

Her head went up and she hesitated, frowned, shrugged her shoulders, and then said, "Oh, I don't care. Any time."

"How about this next weekend? Would that be all right?"

The slow, narrow eyes rested a moment on mine, then traveled away. "I suppose so, if you wish. I don't care."

And that was how on the following Saturday afternoon I came to be driving down to Wootton with my suitcase in the back of the car. You may think that perhaps I forced the invitation a bit, but I couldn't have gotten it any other way. And apart from the professional aspect, I personally wanted very much to see the house. As

you know, Wooton is one of the truly great stone houses of the early English Renaissance. Like its sisters, Longleat, Wollaton, and Montacute, it was built in the latter half of the sixteenth century when for the first time a great man's house could be designed as a comfortable dwelling, not as a castle, and when a new group of architects such as John Thorpe and the Smithsons were starting to do marvelous things all over the country. It lies south of Oxford, near a small town called Princes Risborough—not a long trip from London—and as I swung in through the main gates, the sky was closing overhead and the early winter evening was beginning.

I went slowly up the long drive, trying to see as much of the grounds as possible, especially the famous topiary which I had heard such a lot about. And I must say it was an impressive sight. On all sides there were massive yew trees, trimmed and clipped into many different comical shapes—hens, pigeons, bottles, boots, armchairs, castles, egg cups, lanterns, old women with flaring petticoats, tall pillars, some crowned with a ball, others with big rounded roofs and stemless mushroom finials—and in the half darkness the greens had turned to black so that each figure, each tree, took on a dark, smooth, sculptural quality. At one point I saw a lawn covered with gigantic chess men, each a live yew tree, marvelously fashioned. I stopped the car, got out, and walked among them, and they were twice as tall as me. What's more, the set was complete, kings, queens, bishops, knights, rooks, and pawns, standing in position as for the start of a game.

Around the next bend I saw the great grey house itself, and in front of it the large entrance forecourt enclosed by a high balustraded wall with small pillared pavilions at its outer angles. The piers of the balustrades were surmounted by stone obelisks—the Italian influence on the Tudor mind—and a flight of steps at least a hundred feet wide led up to the house.

As I drove into the forecourt, I noticed with rather a shock that the fountain basin in the middle supported a large statue by Epstein. A lovely thing, mind you, but surely not quite in sympathy with its surroundings. Then, looking back as I climbed the stairway to the front door, I saw that on all the little lawns and terraces round about there were other modern statues and many kinds of curious sculpture. In the distance, I thought I recognized Gaudier, Breska, Brancusi, Saint-Gaudens, Henry Moore, and Epstein again.

The door was opened by a young footman who led me up to a bedroom on the first floor. Her ladyship, he explained, was resting, so were the other guests, but they would all be down in the main drawing room in an hour or so, dressed for dinner:

Now in my job it is necessary to do a lot of weekending. I suppose I spend around fifty Saturdays and Sundays a year in other people's houses, and as a result I have become fairly sensitive to unfamiliar atmospheres. I can tell good or bad almost by sniffing with my nose the moment I get in the front door; and this one I was in now I did not like. The place smelled wrong. There was the faint, desiccated whiff of something troublesome in the air; I was conscious of it even as I lay steaming luxuriously in my great marble bath; and I couldn't help hoping that no unpleasant things were going to happen before Monday came.

The first of them—though more of a surprise than an unpleasantness—occurred ten minutes later. I was sitting on the bed putting on my socks when softly the door opened, and an ancient lopsided gnome in black tails slid into the room. He was the butler, he explained, and his name was Jelks, and he did so hope I was comfortable and had everything I wanted.

I told him I was and had.

He said he would do all he could to make my weekend agreeable. I thanked him and waited for him to go. He hesitated, and then, in a voice dripping with unction, he begged permission to mention a rather delicate matter. I told him to go ahead.

To be quite frank, he said, it was about tipping. The whole business of tipping made him acutely miserable.

Oh? And why was that?

Well, if I really wanted to know, he didn't like the idea that his guests felt under an obligation to tip him when they left the house—as indeed they did. It was an undignified proceeding both for the tipper and the tipped. Moreover, he was well aware of the anguish that was often created in the minds of guests such as myself, if I would pardon the liberty, who might feel compelled by convention to give more than they could really afford.

He paused, and two small crafty eyes watched my face for a sign. I murmured that he needn't worry himself about such things so far as I was concerned.

On the contrary, he said, he hoped sincerely that I would agree from the beginning to give him no tip at all.

"Well," I said, "Let's not fuss about it now, and when the time

comes we'll see how we feel."

"No, sir!" he cried. "Please, I really must insist."

So I agreed.

He thanked me, and shuffled a step or two closer. Then, laying his head on one side and clasping his hands before him like a priest, he gave a tiny apologetic shrug of the shoulders. The small, sharp eyes were still watching me, and I waited, one sock on, the other in my hands, trying to guess what was coming next.

All that he would ask, he said softly, so softly now that his voice was like music heard faintly in the street outside a great concert hall, all that he would ask was that instead of a tip I should give him thirty-three and a third percent of my winnings at cards over the weekend. If I lost, there would be nothing to pay.

It was all so soft and smooth and sudden that I was not even surprised.

"Do they play a lot of cards, Jelks?"

"Yes, sir, a great deal."

"Isn't thirty-three and a third a bit steep?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"I'll give you ten percent."

"No, sir, I couldn't do that." He was now examining the fingernails of his left hand, and patiently frowning.

"Then we'll make it fifteen. All right?"

"Thirty-three and a third, sir. It's very reasonable. After all, sir, seeing that I don't even know if you are a good player, what I'm actually doing, not meaning to be personal, is backing a horse and I've never seen it run."

No doubt you think that I should never have started bargaining with the butler in the first place, and perhaps you are right. But being a liberal-minded person, I always try my best to be affable with the lower classes. Apart from that, the more I thought about it, the more I had to admit to myself that it was an offer no sportsman had the right to reject.

"All right then, Jelks. As you wish."

"Thank you, sir." He moved toward the door, walking slowly sideways like a crab; but once more he hesitated, a hand on the knob. "If I may give you a little advice, sir—may I?"

"Yes?"

"It's simply that her ladyship tends to overbid her hand."

Now *this* was going too far. I was so startled I dropped my sock. After all, it's one thing to have a harmless little sporting arrange-

ment with the butler about tipping, but when he begins conniving with you to take money away from the hostess, then it's time to call a halt.

"All right, Jelks. Now that'll do."

"No offense, sir, I hope. All I mean is you're bound to be playing against her ladyship. She always partners Major Haddock."

"Major Haddock? You mean Major Jack Haddock?"

"Yes, sir."

I noticed there was the trace of a sneer around the corners of Jelks's nose when he spoke about this man. And it was worse with Lady Turton. Each time he said "her ladyship," he spoke the words with the outsides of his lips as though he were nibbling a lemon, and there was a subtle, mocking inflection in his voice.

"You'll excuse me now, sir. *Her ladyship* will be down at seven o'clock. So will *Major Haddock* and the others." He slipped out the door, leaving behind him a certain dampness in the room and a faint smell of embrocation.

Shortly after seven, I found my way to the main drawing room, and Lady Turton, as beautiful as ever, got up to greet me.

"I wasn't even sure you were coming," she said in that peculiar lilting voice. "What's your name again?"

"I'm afraid I took you at your word, Lady Turton. I hope it's all right."

"Why not?" she said. "There's forty-seven bedrooms in the house. This is my husband."

A small man came around the back of her and said, "You know, I'm so glad you were able to come." He had a lovely warm smile and when he took my hand I felt instantly a touch of friendship in his fingers.

"And Carmen La Rosa," Lady Turton said.

This was a powerfully-built woman who looked as though she might have something to do with horses. She nodded at me, and although my hand was already halfway out, she didn't give me hers, thus forcing me to convert the movement into a noseblow.

"You have a cold?" she said. "I'm sorry."

I did not like Miss Carmen La Rosa.

"And this is Jack Haddock."

I knew this man slightly. He was a director of companies (whatever that may mean), and a well-known member of society. I had used his name a few times in my column, but I had never liked him, and this, I think, was mainly because I have a deep suspicion

of all people who carry their military titles back with them into private life—especially majors and colonels. Standing there in his dinner jacket with his full-blooded animal face and black eyebrows and large white teeth, he looked so handsome there was almost something indecent about it. He had a way of raising his upper lip when he smiled, baring the teeth, and he was smiling now as he gave me a hairy brown hand.

"I hope you're going to say some nice things about us in your column."

"He better had," Lady Turton said, "or I'll say some nasty ones about him on my front page."

I laughed, but the three of them, Lady Turton, Major Haddock, and Carmen La Rosa had already turned away and were settling themselves back in the sofa. Jelks gave me a drink, and Sir Basil drew me gently aside for a quiet chat at the other end of the room. Every now and again Lady Turton would call to her husband to fetch her something—another martini, a cigarette, an ashtray, a handkerchief—and he, half rising from his chair, would be forestalled by the watchful Jelks, who fetched it for him.

Clearly, Jelks loved his master; and just as clearly he hated the wife. Each time he did something for her, he made a little sneer with his nose and drew his lips together so they puckered like a turkey's bottom.

At dinner, our hostess sat her two friends, Haddock and La Rosa, on either side of her. This unconventional arrangement left Sir Basil and me at the other end of the table where we were able to continue our pleasant talk about painting and sculpture. Of course it was obvious to me by now that the major was infatuated with her ladyship. And again, although I hate to say it, it seemed as though the La Rosa woman was hunting the same bird.

All this foolishness appeared to delight the hostess. But it did not delight her husband. I could see that he was conscious of the little scene all the time we were talking; and often his mind would wander from our subject and he would stop short in mid-sentence, his eyes traveling down to the other end of the table to settle pathetically for a moment on that lovely head with the black hair and the curiously flaring nostrils. He must have noticed then how exhilarated she was, how the hand that gestured as she spoke rested every now and again on the major's arm, and how the other woman, the one who perhaps had something to do with horses, kept saying, "*Nata-li-a!* Now, *Nata-li-a*, listen to me!"

"Tomorrow," I said, "you must take me round and show me the sculptures you've put in the garden."

"Of course," he said, "with pleasure." He glanced again at the wife, and his eyes had a sort of supplicating look that was piteous beyond words. He was so mild and passive a man in every way that even now I could see there was no anger in him, no danger, no chance of an explosion.

After dinner I was ordered straight to the cardtable to partner Miss Carmen La Rosa against Major Haddock and Lady Turton. Sir Basil sat quietly on the sofa with a book.

There was nothing unusual about the game itself; it was routine and rather dull. But Jelks was a nuisance. All evening he prowled around us, emptying ashtrays and asking about drinks and peering at our hands. He was obviously short-sighted and I doubt he saw much of what was going on because as you may or may not know, here in England no butler has ever been permitted to wear spectacles—nor, for that matter, a mustache. This is the golden, unbreakable rule, and a very sensible one it is, too, although I'm not quite sure what lies behind it. I presume that a mustache would make him look too much like a gentleman, and spectacles too much like an American, and where would we be then, I should like to know? In any event Jelks was a nuisance all evening; and so was Lady Turton, who was constantly being called to the phone on newspaper business.

At eleven o'clock she looked up from her cards and said, "Basil, it's time you went to bed."

"Yes, my dear, perhaps it is." He closed the book, got up, and stood for a minute watching the play. "Are you having a good game?" he asked.

The others didn't answer him, so I said, "It's a nice game."

"I'm so glad. And Jelks will look after you and get anything you want."

"Jelks can go to bed, too," the wife said.

I could hear Major Haddock breathing through his nose beside me, and the soft drop of the cards one by one onto the table, and then the sound of Jelks's feet shuffling over the carpet toward us.

"You wouldn't prefer me to stay, m'lady?"

"No. Go to bed. You too, Basil."

"Yes, my dear. Goodnight. Goodnight all."

Jelks opened the door for him, and he went slowly out, followed by the butler.



As soon as the next rubber was over, I said that I too wanted to go to bed.

"All right," Lady Turton said. "Goodnight."

I went up to my room, locked the door, took a pill, and went to sleep.

The next morning, Sunday, I got up and dressed around ten o'clock and went down to the breakfast room. Sir Basil was there before me, and Jelks was serving him with grilled kidneys and bacon and fried tomatoes. He was delighted to see me and suggested that as soon as we had finished eating we should take a long walk around the grounds. I told him nothing would give me more pleasure:

Half an hour later we started out, and you've no idea what a relief it was to get away from that house and into the open air. It was one of those warm, shining days that come occasionally in midwinter after a night of heavy rain, with a bright surprising sun and no breath of wind. Bare trees seemed beautiful in the sunlight, water still drip-dripping from the branches, and wet places all around were sparkling with diamonds. The sky had small faint clouds.

"What a lovely day!"

"Yes—isn't it a lovely day!"

We spoke hardly another word during the walk; it wasn't necessary. But he took me everywhere and I saw it all—the huge chessmen and all the rest of the topiary. The elaborate garden houses, the pools, the fountains, the children's maze whose hedges were hornbeam and lime so that it was only good in summer when the leaves were out, and the parterres, the rockeries, the green-houses with their vines and nectarine trees. And, of course, the sculpture. Most of the contemporary European sculptors were there, in bronze, granite, limestone, and wood; and although it was a pleasure to see them warming and glowing in the sun, to me they still looked a trifle out of place in these vast, formal surroundings.

"Shall we rest here now a little while?" Sir Basil said after we had walked for more than an hour. So we sat down on a white bench beside a water-lily pond full of carp and goldfish, and lit cigarettes. We were some way from the house, on a piece of ground that was raised above its surroundings, and from where we sat the gardens were spread out below us like a drawing in one of those old books on garden architecture, with the hedges and lawns and terraces and fountains making a pretty pattern of squares and

rings.

"My father bought this place just before I was born," Sir Basil said. "I've lived here ever since, and I know every inch of it. Each day I grow to love it more."

"It must be wonderful in summer."

"Oh, but it is. You should come down and see it in May and June. Will you promise to do that?"

"Of course," I said. "I'd love to come," and as I spoke I was watching the figure of a woman dressed in red moving among the flowerbeds in the far distance. I saw her cross over a wide expanse of lawn, and there was a lilt in her walk, a little shadow attending her, and when she was over the lawn, she turned left and went along one side of a high wall of clipped yew until she came to another smaller lawn that was circular and had in its center a piece of sculpture.

"This garden is younger than the house," Sir Basil said. "It was laid out early in the eighteenth century by a Frenchman called Beaumont, the same fellow who did Levens, in Westmoreland. For at least a year he had two hundred and fifty men working on it."

The woman in the red dress had been joined now by a man, and they were standing face to face, about a yard apart, in the very center of the whole garden panorama, on this little circular patch of lawn, apparently conversing. The man had some small black object in his hand.

"If you're interested, I'll show you the bills that Beaumont put in to the old duke while he was making it."

"I'd like very much to see them. They must be fascinating."

"He paid his laborers a shilling a day, and they worked ten hours."

In the clear sunlight it was not difficult to follow the movements and gestures of the two figures on the lawn. They had turned now toward the piece of sculpture, and were pointing at it in a sort of mocking way, apparently laughing and making jokes about its shape. I recognized it as being one of the abstract Henry Moores, done in wood, a thin smooth object of singular beauty that had two or three holes in it and a number of strange limbs protruding.

"When Beaumont planted the yew trees for the chessmen and the other things, he knew they wouldn't amount to much for at least a hundred years. We don't seem to possess that sort of patience in our planning these days, do we? What do you think?"

"No," I said. "We don't."

The black object in the man's hand turned out to be a camera, and now he had stepped back and was taking pictures of the woman beside the Henry Moore. She was striking a number of different poses, all of them, so far as I could see, ludicrous and meant to be amusing. Once she put her arms around one of the protruding wooden limbs and hugged it, and another time she climbed up and sat sidesaddle on the thing, holding imaginary reins in her hands. A great wall of yew hid these two people from the house, and indeed from all the rest of the garden except the little hill on which we sat. They had every right to believe that they were not overlooked, and even if they had happened to glance our way—which was into the sun—I doubt they would have noticed the two small motionless figures sitting on the bench beside the pond.

"You know, I love these yews," Sir Basil said. "The color of them is so wonderful in a garden because it rests the eye. And in the summer it breaks up the areas of brilliance into little patches and makes them more comfortable to admire. Have you noticed the different shades of green on the planes and facets of each clipped tree?"

"It's lovely, isn't it."

The man now seemed to be explaining something to the woman, and pointing at the Henry Moore, and I could tell by the way they threw back their heads that they were laughing again. The man continued to point, and then the woman walked around the back of the wood carving, bent down and poked her head through one of its holes. The thing was about the size, shall I say, of a small horse, but thinner than that, and from where I sat I could see both sides of it—to the left, the woman's body, to the right, her head protruding through. It was very much like one of those jokes at the seaside where you put your head through a hole in a board and get photographed as a fat lady. The man was photographing her now.

"There's another thing about yews," Sir Basil said. "In the early summer when the young shoots come out . . ." At that moment he paused and sat up straighter and leaned slightly forward, and I could sense his whole body suddenly stiffening.

"Yes," I said, "when the young shoots come out?"

The man had taken the photograph; but the woman still had her head through the hole, and now I saw him put both hands (as well as the camera) behind his back and advance toward her. Then he bent forward so his face was close to hers, touching it, and he held

it there while he gave her, I suppose, a few kisses or something like that. In the stillness that followed, I fancied I heard a faint faraway tinkle of female laughter coming to us through the sunlight across the garden.

"Shall we go back to the house?" I asked.

"Back to the house?"

"Yes, shall we go back and have a drink before lunch?"

"A drink? Yes, we'll have a drink." But he didn't move. He sat very still, gone far away from me now, staring intently at the two figures. I also was staring at them. I couldn't take my eyes away; I *had* to look. It was like seeing a dangerous little ballet in miniature from a great distance, and you knew the dancers and the music but not the end of the story, not the choreography, nor what they were going to do next, and you were fascinated, and you *had* to look.

"Gaudier Breska," I said. "How great do you think he might've become if he hadn't died so young?"

"Who?"

"Gaudier Breska."

"Yes," he said. "Of course."

I noticed now that something queer was happening. The woman still had her head through the hole, but she was beginning to wriggle her body from side to side in a slow, unusual manner, and the man was standing motionless, a pace or so away, watching her. He seemed suddenly uneasy the way he stood there, and I could tell by the drop of the head and by the stiff, intent set of the body that there was no laughter in him any more. For a while he remained still, then I saw him place his camera on the ground and go forward to the woman, taking her head in his hands; and all at once it was more like a puppet show than a ballet, with tiny wooden figures performing tiny jerky movements, crazy and unreal, on a faraway sunlit stage.

We sat quietly together on the white bench, and we watched while the tiny puppet man began to manipulate the woman's head with his hands. He was doing it gently, there was no doubt about that, slowly and gently, stepping back every now and then to think about it some more, and several times crouching down to survey the situation from another angle. Whenever he left her alone the woman would again start to wriggle her body and the peculiar way she did it reminded me of a dog that feels a collar round its neck for the first time.

"She's stuck," Sir Basil said.

And now the man was walking to the other side of the carving, the side where the woman's body was, and he put out his hands and began trying to do something with her neck. Then, as though suddenly exasperated, he gave the neck two or three quick, jerky pulls, and this time the sound of the woman's voice, raised high in anger, or pain, or both, came back to us small and clear through the sunlight.

Out of the corner of one eye I could see Sir Basil nodding his head quietly up and down. "I got my fist caught in a jar of boiled sweets once," he said, "and I couldn't get it out."

The man had retreated a few yards, and was standing with hands on hips, head up, looking furious and sullen. The woman, from her uncomfortable position, appeared to be talking to him, or rather shouting at him, and although the body itself was pretty firmly fixed and could only wriggle, the legs were free and did a good deal of moving and stamping.

"I broke the jar with a hammer and told my mother I'd knocked it off the shelf by mistake." He seemed calmer now, not tense at all, although his voice was curiously flat. "I suppose we'd better go down and see if we can help."

"Perhaps we should."

But still he didn't move. He took out a cigarette and lit it, putting the used match carefully back in the box.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Will you have one?"

"Thanks, I think I will." He made a little ceremony of giving me the cigarette and lighting it for me, and again he put the used match back in the box. Then we got up and walked slowly down the grass slope.

We came upon them silently, through an archway in the yew hedge, and it was naturally quite a surprise.

"What's the matter here?" Sir Basil asked. He spoke softly, with a dangerous softness that I'm sure his wife had never heard before.

"She's gone and put her head through the hole and now she can't get it out," Major Haddock said. "Just for a lark, you know."

"For a what?"

"Basil!" Lady Turtón shouted. "Don't be such a damn fool! Do something, can't you!" She may not have been able to move much, but she could still talk.

"Pretty obvious we're going to have to break up this lump of wood," the major said. There was a small smudge of red on his grey

mustache, and this, like the single extra touch of color that ruins a perfect painting, managed somehow to destroy all his manly good looks. It made him comic.

"You mean break the Henry Moore?"

"My dear sir, there's no other way of setting the lady free. God knows how she managed to squeeze it in, but I know for a fact she can't pull it out. It's the ears get in the way."

"Oh dear," Sir Basil said. "What a terrible pity. My beautiful Henry Moore."

At this stage Lady Turton began abusing her husband in a most unpleasant manner, and there's no knowing how long it would have gone on had not Jelks suddenly appeared out of the shadows. He came sidling silently onto the lawn and stationed himself at a respectful distance from Sir Basil, as though awaiting instructions. His black clothes looked perfectly ridiculous in the morning sunlight, and with his ancient pink-white face and white hands he was like some small crabby animal that has lived all its life in a hole under the ground.

"Is there anything I can do, Sir Basil?" He kept his voice level, but I didn't think his face was quite straight. When he looked at Lady Turton, there was a little exulting glimmer in his eyes.

"Yes, Jelks, there is. Go back and get me a saw or something so I can cut out a section of this wood."

"Shall I call one of the men, Sir Basil? William is a good carpenter."

"No, I'll do it myself. Just get the tools—and hurry."

While they were waiting for Jelks, I strolled away because I didn't wish to hear any more of the things that Lady Turton was saying to her husband. But I was back in time to see the butler returning, followed now by the other woman, Carmen La Rosa, who made a rush for the hostess.

"Nata-li-a! My dear Nata-li-a! What *have* they done to you?"

"Oh, shut up," the hostess said. "And get out of the way, will you."

Sir Basil took up a position close to his lady's head, waiting for Jelks. Jelks advanced slowly, carrying a saw in one hand, an axe in the other, and he stopped maybe a yard away. He then held out both implements in front of him so his master could choose, and there was a brief moment—no more than two or three seconds—of silence, and of waiting, and it just happened that I was watching Jelks at this time. I saw the hand that was carrying the axe come

forward an extra fraction of an inch toward Sir Basil. It was so slight a movement it was barely noticeable—a tiny pushing forward of the hand, slow and secret, a little offer, a little coaxing offer that was accompanied perhaps by an infinitesimal lift of the eyebrows.

I'm not sure whether Sir Basil saw it, but he hesitated, and again the hand that held the axe came edging forward, and it was almost exactly like that card trick where the man says "Take one, whichever one you want," and you always get the one he means you to have. Sir Basil got the axe. I saw him reach out in a dreamy sort of way, accepting it from Jelks, and then, the instant he felt the handle in his grasp, he seemed to realize what was required of him and he sprang to life.

For me, after that, it was like the awful moment when you see a child running out into the road and a car is coming and all you can do is shut your eyes tight and wait until the noise tells you it has happened. The moment of waiting becomes a long lucid period of time with yellow and red spots dancing on a black field, and even if you open your eyes again and find that nobody has been killed or hurt, it makes no difference because so far as you and your stomach were concerned you saw it all.

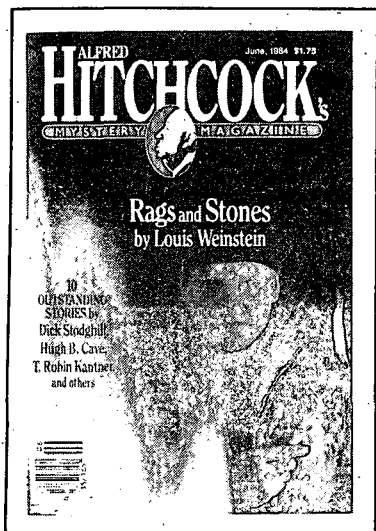
I saw this one all right, every detail of it, and I didn't open my eyes again until I heard Sir Basil's voice, even softer than usual, calling in gentle protest to the butler.

"Jelks," he was saying, and I looked and saw him standing there as calm as you please, still holding the axe. Lady Turton's head was there, too, still sticking through the hole, but her face had turned a terrible ashy grey, and the mouth was opening and shutting and making a kind of gurgling sound.

"Look here, Jelks," Sir Basil was saying. "What on earth are you thinking about. This thing's much too dangerous. Give me the saw." And as he exchanged implements I noticed for the first time two little warm roses of color appearing on his cheeks, and above them, all around the corners of his eyes, the twinkling tiny wrinkles of a smile.



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# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



**I**t's that time of year again. You've put away all your holiday gifts, and the holiday bills are now pouring in. You've added your name to the flyleaf of your 1985 appointment book, taking care to write in your best hand, knowing full well that your penmanship will deteriorate as the months pass. You're vainly trying to remember what year it is now when you write checks. And as the winter winds howl outdoors, that comfy spot on the couch in front of the fireplace beckons you to curl up with a good book.

It's also time for the traditional list of New Year's resolutions. I have a friend who is forever adding new titles to the pages of a small notebook she carries with her everywhere. If

she did nothing but read for the remainder of her life, she would probably not get through her list. But when she goes into a bookstore or library, she knows exactly what she's seeking there. So if you feel compelled to compose a resolution list this month, why not make it a list of mysteries you want to read? It certainly beats a list of things you *ought to do* (chores like diet, clean hall closets, etc.).

To assist you, I thought I'd review the thirty-two authors who've been profiled in this column over the past two and a half years. Remember, they're all creators of outstanding mystery series that feature an ongoing character or characters. I've tried to group them together here in terms of general

style; thus, if you like one of the writers in a group, chances are good that you'll enjoy books by the others in that group. As the hero's name might be more recognizable to you, I've put it in parentheses after the author. And remember: this list isn't complete. There will be new authors profiled here in the months to come.

One of my favorite authors is **Dorothy Sayers** (*Lord Peter Wimsey*), whose books are elegantly written and beautifully plotted. Her hero, who is dapper and sophisticated and very wealthy, is a gifted amateur who is very much a product of post-World War I Europe. The same can be said of the creations of **Margery Allingham** (*Albert Campion*) and **E.C. Bentley** (*Philip Trent*). Look for sparkling British wit, first-class settings, and a strong sense of period. Similar to Sayers' books in their overtones of witty fun are the works of **Edmund Crispin** (*Gervase Fen*) and **Michael Innes** (*Sir John Appleby*), who are also British and whose stories are generally even zanier than their compatriots' tales.

Nero Wolfe ranks very high among American detectives. Author Rex Stout hit upon an irresistible combo with Wolfe's sparring relationship to his "leg man," Archie. Stout fans will love the sparks that **Lucille**

**Kallen** lets fly between her two amateur criminologists (*C.B. Greenfield and Maggie*). The oft-amusing eccentricities embodied in Nero Wolfe make him kin to the characters created by **Jane Langton** (*Homer Kelly*), who sets her mysteries in New England and populates them with full-blooded "Yankees." (Langton may also be the only mystery novelist alive who illustrates her books with her own lovely pen-and-ink drawings.) Early Nero Wolfe mysteries are also enhanced by the strong flavor of New York as it was decades ago, and that same sense of period is strong in **Hilda Lawrence's** compelling mysteries (starring *Mark East*). But if your idea of the perfect eccentric detective is Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, then you'll enjoy the series penned by **Patricia Wentworth** (*Miss Maud Silver*).

Solving crimes is much more serious business to those investigators who follow in the weary footsteps of characters created by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. Though these novels share much—contemporary settings, seamy crimes, unsentimental themes, and often unsympathetic characters—there are still choices within the genre. Gritty scenes of L.A. are the forte of **Arthur Lyons** (private eye *Jake Asch*), while an affluent coastal

community in Florida is home to **Ed McBain's** hero (lawyer *Matthew Hope*). Hope is an amateur who keeps stumbling onto murder, as does the hero in the series created by **Arthur Mal-ing** (*Brock Potter*), whose territory is Wall Street and the world of high finance. **Stephen Greenleaf's** leading actor is a P.I. (*John Marshall Tanner*) both smart and sensitive; while **Robert Parker's** "man's man" (*Spenser*) is quick to act, tough and deadly, and sensitive in his own special way. This genre features a loner as protagonist, and is almost solely the domain of American writers. One exception is British writer **Simon Brett** (*Charles Paris*), whose hard-drinking, usually down-and-out actor fits neatly into Sam Spade's scuffed but solid shoes.

Another group of authors—all, as it happens, from beyond our shores—have a similar view of the harshness of modern life, but they focus on the police and their methods. There are often several characters who star in these books, and frequently several crimes must be solved in the course of the novel. Outstanding in this format are the ten novels by Swedish authors **Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö** (the *Martin Beck* books). Set in Stockholm, they say as much about society as they do about police proce-

dures. Other writers who share a similar fascination for the police, and the milieu of crime, are **Janwillem van de Wetering** (*Grijpstra, de Gier, and the Commisaris*) in Amsterdam; **Peter Dickinson** (*Superintendent Jimmy Pibble*) in London; **James McClure** (*Lieutenant Tromp Kramer and Mickey Zondi*) in South Africa; and **Arthur Upfield** (*Napoleon "Bony" Bonaparte*) in Australia. The foreign settings are no small part of the appeal of these books.

Then there's the sleepy English village rudely awakened by crime. It's a familiar format, popular among Agatha Christie fans, and one that mystery readers seem either to love or hate. These can be police procedurals, too, though they usually employ a single detective or pair of detectives brought in to solve a single murder. While the above authors deal with the sociology of crime, these writers prefer to explore the psychology of criminals. **Ruth Rendell**, known for her suspense novels as well as for her series books (*Chief Inspector Reginald Wexford*), is perhaps one of the most favored in this group. In the same vein and also worthy of note are **Elizabeth Lemarchand** (with her *Tom Pollard and Greg Toye* of the C.I.D.), and **W.J. Burley** (*Detective Chief Superintendent*

**Wycliffe**). **Patricia Moyes** (*Chief Inspector Henry Tibbett*) adds a little whimsy and a few exotic locations to her procedurals, just two of several ways in which her books vary from the standard fare. **Leo Bruce** (*Sergeant Beef*) created an almost comical hero for his tales, a stark contrast to the serious and mild-mannered lawyer/hero (*Francis Pettigrew*) in **Cyril Hare's** books. There's a single American author whom I've included in this group, although one could accuse **Martha Grimes** (*Inspector Richard Jury and sidekick Melrose Plant*) of creating a half-timbered, Jolly Olde England that has never existed—not outside the average American's imagination, that is. Never mind. If you're looking for weightier murder, go back to the beginning of this paragraph.

No one has ever accused Beverly Hills of being a "sleepy village," but the mysteries of **E.V. Cunningham** (*Masao Masuto*) do bear a resemblance to the books mentioned above. These are police procedurals, too, although the detective is a nisei, as well as a Zen Buddhist. But the small, wealthy enclave of Beverly Hills is Masuto's turf, and the crimes he investigates are integral to the lifestyles of the neighborhood's denizens.

Finally, there have been four series profiled in these pages

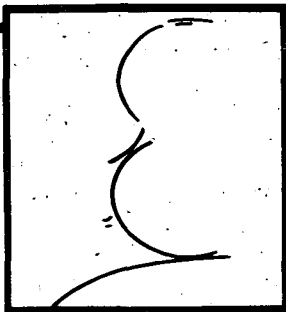
that fit into no category. **John le Carré** (*George Smiley*) writes Cold War espionage thrillers like no one else; he has no peer. **Peter Lovesey** (*Sergeant Cribb*) and **Ellis Peters** (*Brother Cadfael*) have so carefully detailed the backgrounds of their books—Victorian England and monastic, medieval England respectively—that they can be said to write "historical mysteries." If you enjoyed the best-selling *Name of the Rose*, you should add these two authors to your list. Finally, **Dorothy Dunnett's** hero (*Johnson Johnson*) is a celebrated portrait painter who works for British intelligence, but these aren't spy novels in any conventional sense. Each book is narrated by a young female (the "bird" that appears in each of the titles, along with Johnson's yacht, *Dolly*) who is actually the protagonist of each novel. If you're looking for something fresh and original and quite different from any mystery you've ever read, then put Dunnett at the top of that list you've been making.

So here they are, the thirty-two writers who have been subjects of this column. If I've missed any of your favorites, drop me a line, because next month we'll return to the regular format.

In the meantime, happy reading in 1985!

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



**I**sraeli counterintelligence takes on Palestinian international terrorism in **The Little Drummer Girl**, which is based on the latest novel by John le Carré. For Le Carré, keeping moral values in a state of confusion is as important as straightening them out is for others. In *The Little Drummer Girl* the famous Le Carré irony, in which neither East nor West has a clear moral advantage, is applied to the undercover struggle that radiates out from the Middle East to Europe and England.

In Germany a young Palestinian drives his Scandinavian girlfriend to the home of an Israeli diplomat. With an innocent smile she delivers a suitcase bomb that kills the diplomat, his wife, and his child. But here, as throughout the movie, Le Carré's ironic subtleties have

had to be simplified. In the book the bomb does not kill the parents. Instead, the injured diplomat limps home to Israel to grieve with his wife, who has lost her leg. Furthermore, two of the dead bystanders—none of whom is shown in the movie—are the kind of people with whom the Palestinians supposedly identify: a Sicilian cook and a Philippine chauffeur.

Before the bombers can strike again, the Israelis mount an elaborate international undercover operation masterminded by the always sinister Klaus Kinski. The person they are really after is the elusive terrorist loner who selects the targets, and who is the brother of the driver. The catspaw who will draw the loner out into the open is a most unlikely but brilliant choice. She is Charlie, a

somewhat vague, unfulfilled actress. A radical, a peace activist, a Palestinian sympathizer, and passionately anti-Israel, she will never be suspected of being an agent.



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Diane Keaton in *The Little Drummer Girl*.

But how can such a person be recruited? The longest scene in the movie, as in the book, follows the literally overnight transformation of Charlie into a willing anti-terrorist agent. In order to comprehend this process, though, it is necessary to know what Charlie is thinking and experiencing beneath the surface. On screen we can only see that reciting her life story gets her extremely upset. Her quick change of heart is simply not convincing, even given her love interest in one of the Israeli recruiters.

Once the action gets going, psychology becomes less important. Technology and tech-

nique, the great attractions of the spy form, now take over. The analysis of bomb fragments can reveal the "signature" of a bomb maker. Cars can be tailed by two-man teams in radio contact: one car drives several miles in front and the other stays out of sight in the rear. Interrogation of a captured enemy is sometimes conducted not in order to extract secrets but for the purpose of studying speech habits—in this case so that false love letters by the Palestinian bomber can be provided for Charlie.

Her job is to go through an interrogation and acceptance process among the Palestinians similar to that imposed on her by the Israelis. Once she has gained the enemy's confidence, it is hoped, the bomber's elusive brother will get in touch with her. It is a nice, intricate plot, and nicely worked out on screen with very little deviation from the book. Diane Keaton's playing of Charlie as an American instead of an Englishwoman only helps to establish her initial political innocence.

Le Carré's politics are another matter. Luckily, much of his bitter cynicism has been left out of the movie version of *The Little Drummer Girl*. The action thriller, after all, is hardly a suitable vehicle for dealing with the moral questions raised by Middle East politics.



# THE STORY THAT WON



Andre Kertesz

The October Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Don Shaffer of San Mateo, California. Honorable mentions go to Carol Borchers of Whittier, California; Richard Ciciarelli of Phelps, New York; Lillian Tweedy of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania; Martha Dobson of Gainesville, Florida; Gil Anderson of Barstow, California; Traci Joy Hamm of Unionville, Indiana; E. Narroay of Victoria, B.C., Canada; David Meadows of Healdton, Oklahoma; Alfred M. Brody of Saint Louis, Missouri; Richard T. Hedden of Trenton, New Jersey; Liz Gonzales of Wickett, Texas; Patricia Gardner of East Williston, New York; G. A. Kritzer of Deerfield Beach, Florida; and Anthony Pianezza of Montreal, Canada.

## AIRTIGHT WITH JUST A SMALL LEAK by Don Shaffer

It was on the second tilt of the brown paper bag bottle that Murphy's fogged brain registered what his eyes had seen. He choked, spewing cheap wine, and sobbed, "Oh, Lord, it finally happened." Dropping the bottle, he headed for a park exit at a staggering run.

Desk Sergeant Dave Stutz set his cafeteria tray across from Detective Pete Gregory and commented, "You look like death warmed over. Been assigned the stolen property inventory again?"

"No, I've been up since midnight working on a stolen model boat case," Pete groaned.

"Since when does homicide work petty larceny?"

"It's not petty. This boat is a scale model from the Admiralty Club display, and the fittings and guns are solid gold," Pete sighed. "Besides, the night watchman was killed."

"Solid gold, huh! Any leads?"

"Could be one of three," Pete said. "The murder occurred between seven and ten last night. Everyone has an airtight alibi except for a different hour during that time. If I could place the time of death exactly, I could go get some sleep."

"Elementary, my dear Pete," Dave laughed. "Just grab the one who doesn't have an alibi between eight and nine. That will be five bucks, please."

"How come you know so much about it?" Pete demanded.

"Easy," Dave said. "The night desk report had an item about a scared wino having seen a boat walking across the park at eight twenty-six."

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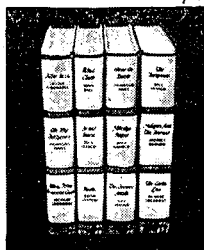
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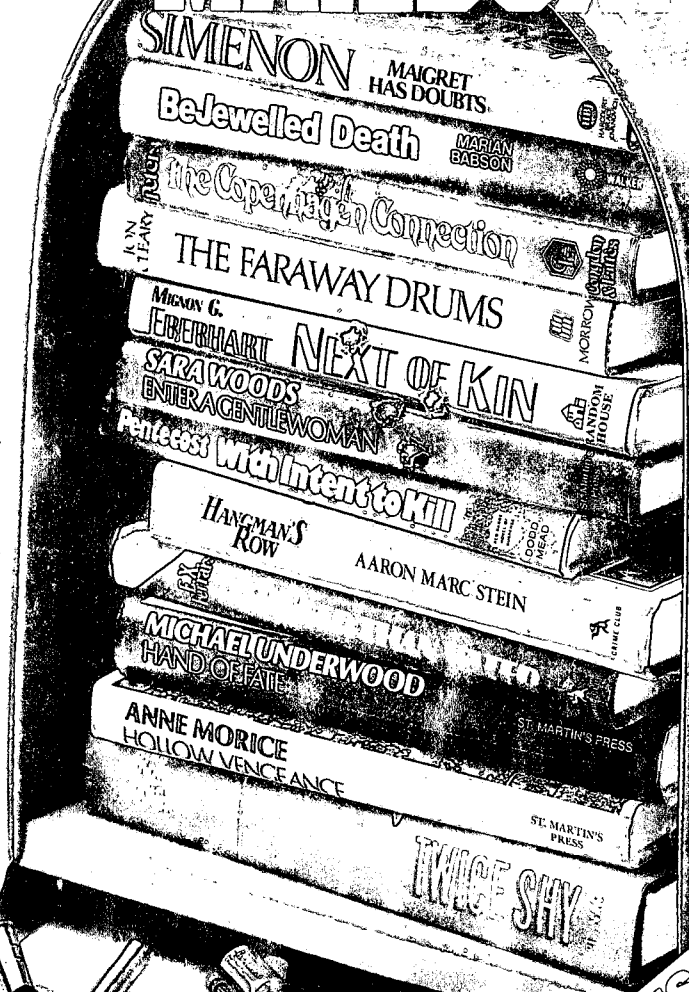
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